THE PRICE SHE PAID

A Temperance Tale

By J. W. KEYWORTH.

To Leila

From Tilly & Hubert

Christmas 1912

"There's some one waiting for you at home."—*Page 95.*

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. . A Temperance Tale . .

BY

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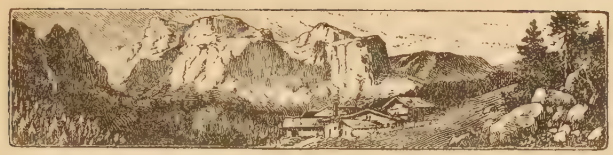

THE PRICE SHE PAID.

CHAPTER I.

ARTHUR VIVIAN SIGNS THE PLEDGE.

"I'VE called, Mrs. Vivian, to take Arthur to the Temperance meeting," said Frank Livingstone, with a pleasant smile.

The neat little servant maid had just shown him into the cosy sitting-room where the lady he addressed, seated in a low chair before the fire, was absorbed in the enraptured contemplation of a small baby which lay in her lap. She started up at the sound of her visitor's voice, gathering around her child, as she did so, the fleecy pink and white shawl which was spread beneath it on her knees,

The season was mid-winter, and the evening was cold. May Vivian made a pleasing picture as she stood with her baby in her arms. She was small of figure, bright-eyed, and fair; and there was a piquancy in her face which was its chief charm.

"It's very good of you, Frank," she said, in amiable mockery, taking his proffered hand.

Everybody liked tall, homely, kind-hearted, genial Frank Livingstone; and May Vivian was no exception to the rule. His teetotalism was the only thing about him that she did not like. But for that, she said, he would have been just sweetly perfect. Her husband and he were like brothers; and to her he was little less.

"Sit down, Frank," she said, drawing a chair up beside her own, in front of the fire. "Arthur has just gone out to post a letter in the pillar across the street. He will be in presently, and then he must speak for himself."

"Thank you," said Frank, taking his seat, and leaning forward towards the low chair, in which the young mother had once more seated herself, with the baby in her lap. "Still the

finest baby in the world, Mrs. Vivian—more so than ever, I expect ?"

"Of course," responded May, with a happy little laugh, pressing the tiny dimpled fist to her lips. "Both Arthur and I are of opinion that our little Dorothy would be bad to beat. She is just three months old to-day, Frank."

"Then she has a birthday every month ?"

"Yes, at present."

"Ah, I suppose she'll not keep that up. It's a good deal better, though, than unfortunate twenty-ninth of February babies, whose birthday comes only once in four years."

"Yes, but its fortunate for their friends."

"You mean because of the presents," laughed Frank; "what a mercenary sentiment!"

"Isn't it ? But there's Arthur at the front-door."

The next moment Arthur Vivian entered the room. He was a well-proportioned young fellow, with a handsome good-humoured face crowned with wavy clusters of chestnut hair, and his age was twenty-eight. He gave his friend a hearty greeting, and took a chair on

the other side of the hearth, so that he sat facing Frank, with May and her baby between.

"I've come to see if I can persuade you to go with me to the Temperance meeting, Arthur," said Frank. "It's in the Queen's Hall, you know."

"Thanks, old fellow," replied Arthur, with a glance towards his wife; "I've no objection, if May—What do you say, dear?"

"Don't look at me," said May, with a merry laugh. "You know my sentiments about Temperance meetings and such things. If Frank had asked me to go, I should have known what to say in a minute. We know our own mind on that subject, don't we, Dolly, you and me?" she added, lifting up her baby, and pressing its face to her cheek.

Arthur really wished to go to the meeting; but he hesitated about leaving his wife by herself for the evening, which he was always reluctant to do.

"You won't mind very much if I go this once, May?"

"Not a bit of it," replied May, merrily,

"as long as you don't sign the pledge. You men are all alike; you think you can't be done without. Why it will be a relief to get you out of the way for an hour or two. Besides, I have business on hand to-night. Daisy is coming, and we have work enough to keep us going. We shall get on much better without any lumbering men bothering about. So off you go. But there must be no nonsense about signing the pledge."

"Oh, Mrs. Vivian," remonstrated Frank, "you can't mean that!"

"Can't I? We shall see."

Arthur Vivian laughed good-humouredly, as he rose from his seat. He was accustomed to such affectionate banter from the lips of his wife.

"Well, Frank," he said, "after that emphatic notice to quit, we had better be going."

Frank rose with a sigh, and proceeded to put on his coat.

"I can't think Mrs. Vivian is serious," he said, regarding her with concern.

"Not she," said Arthur, gaily, as he stooped

to kiss his wife and child. "Are you, May?"

"Of course I am," replied May, in a determined tone, as she looked up into her husband's eyes.

"Well," laughed Arthur, as he turned away, still unconvinced, "you know how to carry it off, May, and no mistake."

"Mrs. Vivian," said Frank, as he came forward to say good-night, "to sign the pledge would be the best thing Arthur could do."

The young wife bent over her baby, and made no reply.

It was a bright, frosty night, and the two friends walked briskly along. The town of Barrowdale, which was the scene of our story, was of considerable size, and they had before them some twenty minutes' walk.

"I hope your wife was really joking, Arthur," said Frank, as they walked along—"about signing the pledge, I mean."

"Oh, yes," responded Arthur, who had almost forgotten the circumstance, "of course she was. You don't know May."

"Because," resumed Frank, "I really want

you to sign the pledge to-night; and, if your wife actually meant what she said just now, it would render the subject a rather delicate one for me to approach."

"Make your mind easy on that score, Frank. Mine is—quite. And I'll tell you a secret: I have for some time been thinking myself that I ought to sign the pledge. Not, you know, that I'm afraid of becoming a drunkard. I don't think there is any danger of that at all. But I am beginning to see that a Christian can't be too emphatic in his stand against strong drink."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," said Frank; "and if you feel free to do it, after what Mrs. Vivian has said, I hope you will sign to-night. And, mind this, Arthur, it will prove to be a good thing even for your own sake."

Daisy was May's sister. She was a bright, good-natured child, about twelve years of age. She had large, thoughtful eyes, and a fair sweet face, on which simplicity and goodness blended their charms. May had no other sister; but she had two brothers—Tom and

Dick, who were just now in transition, being neither exactly boys nor men. May had her own charms; she was not ill-looking; she was affectionate enough in her way, and she was clever and sharp of brains and tongue. Tom and Dick were honest good-hearted lads. But Daisy, true to her name, was the pearl of the family. Everybody loved Daisy, and that for the all-sufficient reason that she was good and kind and helpful to every one. Gentle, sagacious beyond her years, always caring for others and seldom for herself, there were few hearts that Daisy did not win.

Daisy came in a few minutes after Arthur and his friend had left; and almost before she had greeted her sister, she began to lend a helping hand.

"Baby not asleep yet!" she said. "Let me take her. Get up, May dear, and let me sit there."

The next moment, Daisy, seated in the mother's chair, was holding the baby to her breast and swaying gently to and fro.

"I'll get the work ready while you are putting her to sleep," said May.

May was making herself a dress, and Daisy, who was a clever little needlewoman, had come to help in the work. The baby nestled within the arms of her young nurse with a contented little gurgle, her restlessness passed away as by magic; and in a short time she was fast asleep. Very gently Daisy rose, and laid her tender little burden in the cradle, which stood beside the chair.

"There," she said, as, with fingers light as snowflakes, she adjusted the dainty quilt; "now, May, we'll get to work."

When Arthur and Frank reached the hall, which was a building capable of containing fifteen hundred people, they found it almost full. Two popular speakers were expected, either of whom always drew a crowd.

The meeting almost immediately commenced. There was a varied programme. Beside the speeches, there were solos by a well-known singer, anthems by a favourite Temperance choir, and music by a famous string band. But the orators were men of might, who would not play second fiddle to any music in the world.

Arthur enjoyed the music; but it was to the speeches that he paid the greatest heed. He was in a condition to be impressed by the appeals they conveyed. A member of the Methodist Church, to which Frank also belonged, he had lately begun to think it his duty to sign the temperance pledge. The enquiry as to why, being a Christian, he had not become conscious of that obligation long ago belongs to the larger question why there are, in general, so many Christian people who not only do not sign the pledge, but stand aloof altogether from the Temperance cause. Arthur, however, had come to the meeting almost resolved to sign the pledge that very night; and beneath the powerful appeals from the platform he cast all hesitation aside.

"I shall go up and sign, Frank," he said, as the meeting closed.

"How about the wife?" asked Frank.

"Oh, she'll be glad in her heart."

So, in company with a motley crowd, Arthur went up and signed the pledge.

"You'll go home with me, Frank," he said,

half-jokingly, "and help me to bear the brunt?"

"Yes, old fellow, if you wish."

May and Daisy were sitting down to supper when the two friends arrived.

"We thought it was a case of 'We won't go home till morning,'" said May; "so we weren't going to wait. You'll have a bite, Frank?"

"No, thank you; but Arthur has something to say before I go."

At this moment, the maid entered, carrying, on a tray, a bottle of stout.

May bit her lip, and blushed.

"Don't be shocked, Frank," she hastened to say; "I take it for baby's sake—by doctor's orders, you know. I just have half a glass at a time, three times a day. I have screw stoppers, so that it mayn't go flat."

"'For baby's sake'! Oh, Mrs. Vivian!" was all that Frank could say; but there was a world of meaning in his tone.

"But you were saying," said May, quickly, "that Arthur had something to tell me. Is it that he has signed the pledge?"

"Yes, May dear," broke in Arthur; "I knew you were only joking, and I felt it was the right thing for me to do."

May did not express either anger or scorn.

"Very well," she said, with unwonted calmness, "I suppose you know best."

"Mrs. Vivian," said Frank Livingstone, as shortly afterwards he took his leave, "help Arthur in this! You will be thankful for it all your life."

Arthur Vivian was a confidential clerk in a large mercantile house in the town of Barrowdale. Having come in his youth, from his home in a distant part of the country, to enter the service of the firm, he had worked his way up to his present position, and was looking forward to yet further advancement in the time to come. Early in the course of his residence in the town, he had made the acquaintance of May, who was the daughter of a local brewer. Acquaintance had ripened into love; and, after a somewhat protracted courtship, they had been married about two years ago. It was shortly after their marriage that Arthur's conversion had taken place;

and it had been effected chiefly through the influence of his friend, Frank Livingstone, who was in business for himself in the town as a watchmaker and jeweller, and whose acquaintance he had made in connection with a certain cricket club to which they both belonged.

CHAPTER II.

MAY PROVES TRUE TO HER TRAINING.

IN the fact that her father was a brewer and spirit merchant, May Vivian's attitude towards the Temperance question was fully explained. Figuratively speaking, she had been born and nurtured in the odour of alcohol. From childhood she had been familiar with strong drink in almost every form. She had always known it as an invariable part of the equipment of her father's table. It had been, in its various kinds, the universal family beverage, and the never-failing remedy for all the minor ailments of the house. At dinner, the jug of beer was

as much a matter of course as the joint of meat; and when dessert came in the wine decanter was as invariable as the fruit. May's father took his glass of whisky before going to bed with as much regularity, and almost as solemnly, as he conducted family prayers. The interests of the family depending on the sale of strong drink, the prosperity of the liquor trade had always seemed to her a desirable and fitting thing. Her father regularly went to church; and he taught his children that strong drink was a good gift of God, and that teetotalism was a senseless and wicked craze.

It is therefore not surprising that May was displeased with her husband's action in signing the pledge. Previously to his conversion, Arthur's views in regard to strong drink had been much the same as her own, and he had freely partaken of it, though not to the extent of what is regarded as excess. But since he had become a decided Christian, he had entirely relinquished its habitual use and had scarcely taken it at all. This result of her husband's conversion had greatly aggravated the annoyance which May had felt on account

of his conversion itself; and now that he had signed the teetotal pledge her mortification was greater still.

May regarded Arthur's signing of the pledge as an ill-judged action which it would be well for him, if possible, to undo. Such a vow, she thought, would be better violated than kept. She did not deliberately resolve that she would try to induce him to break the pledge; but she wished he had never taken it, and she told herself that it was impossible for her to help him to keep it, as Frank Livingstone had urged. That her Arthur had signed the ridiculous teetotal pledge, as though he had been a "horrid drunkard," was a thought she could not bear.

It was in this state of mind that May, on the afternoon of the day following that on which Arthur had signed the pledge, paid a visit to her father's house. The name of May's father was Bancroft. In his early days he had been plain John Bancroft. Subsequently he had bloomed into Mr. John Bancroft; and he had ultimately ripened into John Bancroft, Esq. Such had been the

doings of beer. He was a correct churchman and a justice of the peace. Did he ever, while sitting in the House of God, bethink him of the obvious frustration of the purposes of such a place by the sale, during certain hours of the sacred day, of the beverage it was his business to make? What were his feelings when it became his duty to pronounce judgment on the forlorn wretches whose ruin had been caused by the very thing which had placed him in a position to be their judge?

John Bancroft, Esq., lived in a large house which he had built, a few years ago, on the outskirts of the town. The house, which stood in its own grounds, with lawn, shrubbery, and kitchen garden, all complete, was, both as to style and equipment, thoroughly up to date, and its situation was respectable and quiet. In selecting the site, Mr. Bancroft had made sure that there was not a public-house within ten minutes' walk, and when, a year or so afterwards, it had been sought to obtain a license for an hotel at an adjacent corner, one of the most strenuous promoters of the successful opposition to the application was

John Bancroft, the brewer. Yet Mr. Bancroft was not a bad man. He rather prided himself on his integrity, and it cannot be denied that he was a thoroughly amiable person—as long as the red rag of the drink question was not flourished in his eyes.

A bright cold day had followed the frosty night, and the white rime still lay on the grass of her father's lawn, as May wheeled the dainty carriage in which lay little Dolly, almost buried in furs and shawls, up to her father's door. The door was opened by Daisy, who had seen her sister arrive.

"Come in, May, and get warm. I'll take baby."

So speaking, Daisy gathered the child in her arms, wraps and all, and carried it swiftly into the dining-room, where she sat down, and spread it out in her lap before the fire.

"Is there any one at home?" asked May, as she followed into the room.

"Yes, mother's upstairs, and father's in the library. We're going to have an early tea; so you'll stay, won't you? You can get back before Arthur comes home."

"Yes, I think I'll stay," responded May, sitting down beside Daisy, and warming her feet.

"May," said Daisy, after a brief pause, "I'm so glad Arthur signed the pledge last night."

"Are you?" said May, drily. "It's more than I am."

"Oh, May, how shocking you are! You ought to be glad, if anybody ought. I think all Christians should be teetotalers. I should be one, if father would let me. I am a kind of one; because, though I'm not allowed to sign the pledge, I never take anything."

"Does father know about Arthur?" asked May, ignoring the latter part of Daisy's speech.

"Yes, and he's very angry. I expect he'll be telling you."

At this point Mr. Bancroft entered the room, followed by his wife. May's father was a little man, with rather coarse features, a purple complexion, and rusty-looking hair. His entrance was like the coming of a breeze—a gusty autumn breeze, which allows little rest

to the fallen leaves. Mrs. Bancroft was as little like her husband as—we intend no disrespect—a stork is like a bantam cock. She was tall, aquiline, and solemn, and as silent as the grave. It was by means of the eyes only that intelligence was obtained of her having entered the room.

"Well, May," said Mr. Bancroft, kissing his daughter in his boisterous way, "how are you? And how's the baby? And what has that husband of yours been up to now?"

May, who was in the act of turning to her mother, looked quickly towards her father again.

"Oh, father, it wasn't my fault, I'm sure."

"No, I don't think it was; but it's a step of which I thoroughly disapprove."

This was the third step taken by Arthur Vivian of which Mr. Bancroft had disapproved. The first was Arthur's marriage of Mr. Bancroft's daughter, and the second was his conversion. It had been a source of great mortification to May's father that she should have thrown herself away upon a clerk, and his anger had not diminished when his

unwelcome son-in-law had thought fit to become a Methodist. But "the most unkindest cut of all" was that the husband of his daughter should have signed the teetotal pledge.

"Ask your husband, from me, May, if he means to bring the whole family into contempt; and see if you can't bring him to his senses. I believe you would have prevented the mischief if you could, and now you must try and get it undone."

May bent her head to hide the mortification which flushed her cheeks.

"I wish he hadn't done it, father, you may be sure of that," was all she said.

Satisfied with the emphatic deliverance he had made, Mr. Bancroft did not again refer to the subject of the pledge-signing that afternoon; but his words had fallen like evil seed into May's heart. It was certain now that she would not help Arthur to keep the pledge. She would not, indeed, deliberately set herself to induce him to break it; but she would let him know what her father thought, and would give him to understand that her father's

disapproval was quite equalled by her own. She loved her husband, of course, and it was because of her love that she was so angry with him for what he had done. She had not said anything to him yet; but he must have seen that she was displeased, and, if not, he should know it to-night. And if, at any time, occasion should present of showing him good reason why his foolish promise should be set aside, she would not let it slip.

Such were the mingled thoughts which stirred in May's mind, like swarming bees, as she walked briskly home, being anxious both to get baby in out of the cold, and to be in time to receive Arthur when he arrived.

It was a few minutes before six when she reached the house. Arthur usually left the office at six o'clock, and got home by a quarter past. May had left instructions with her maid to have his tea ready at the usual time, and she found that her directions had been obeyed. The table was set, there was a cheerful fire, and the kettle was singing a soothing, wooing song upon the hob. May was always careful that nothing necessary to

her husband's comfort should be overlooked, and, conscious of her growing determination to withstand him in one thing, she was the more desirous now of pleasing him in everything else.

By the time May had taken off her things, and transferred her sleeping baby from its carriage to its cradle, she heard the front-door open, and her husband's step was in the hall. The only evidence she had given, the night before, that she was displeased with him for having signed the pledge consisted of the quietness of her manner and her monosyllabic speech. Now, she assured herself, she must tell him plainly of her own and her father's disapproval of the step he had thought fit to take. But not all at once: she must wait, and choose her time. She went out into the hall to meet him, gave him her usual hearty kiss, and helped him off with his coat.

"I've been along home"—she called her father's house "home" still—"this afternoon, dear," she said, as she followed him into the room, "but I hurried back to give you your tea. It's all ready."

"That's my good little wife." And he gave her a grateful kiss.

He was the more pleased in that he thought her displeasure had passed away like an April cloud. But that evening, as they sat together after supper, he learnt that his wife's anger was no passing cloud, and that in the difficult path on which he had set his feet he was to walk without her aid.

"Arthur, didn't you know I was in earnest about the signing of the pledge?"

Arthur started.

"No, May; I thought it was all a joke."

"Well, it wasn't, and I can't think why you did it. Father is angry too."

"I'm sorry to have displeased your father, May, and more so to have grieved you. But what objections can there really be to my having signed the pledge?"

"It's such a ridiculous thing," replied May. "And it's quite unnecessary for you, Arthur; you were in no danger of becoming a drunkard. The fact that others take too much of a good thing is no reason why you shouldn't take any at all. And then it's so unsociable if you can't

occasionally drink a glass with your friends. And besides, it's a kind of reflection on father's business."

"May, dear, don't say such things to me; I can't bear to hear them from your lips. I shouldn't dream of casting a reflection on your father in any way, and I hope he will not take that view of what I have done. I have not signed the pledge altogether for my own sake; I want my influence to do what it can. But, oh, May, it is for my own sake that I have signed it too. You little know"—and he spoke in a low, tremulous tone—"in what danger I have been."

May looked at her husband with startled, questioning eyes, but did not speak.

CHAPTER III.

THE WOUNDS OF A JEWELLED DAGGER.

A FIERCE struggle lay before Arthur Vivian ; and the conflict was to be more desperate than he had expected at first. He was to be denied the sympathy, and perhaps harassed with the opposition, of his wife. Such was the painful discovery he had made. On other forms of antagonism he had counted from the outset. He was not surprised that the anger of May's father had been aroused. There were those also amongst his own acquaintance—young men of his own age—fellow-clerks and others, from whom he knew he might expect ridicule,

and some of whom would do their utmost to induce him to break his pledge. But he had not numbered May amongst his enemies. He had supposed that she would perceive that what he had done was likely to prove beneficial not only to him but also to herself and to their child; and he had hoped that, notwithstanding her disapproval of Teetotalism in general, she would do all in her power to help him to stand his ground. Such had been his confident anticipation; and now his heart sank within him to find that, instead of help, he was to have hindrance, and perhaps frustration, from his wife.

"If May were only with me," he groaned, "it would be all right."

There was, however, an enemy whom Arthur held in greater dread than all the rest; and that enemy was himself. He had indulged in no idle fancy in hinting to his wife of the danger into which he himself had been brought in relation to strong drink. He had been conscious in the secrecy of his heart that the dreadful fascination of the intoxicating cup had caught him in its deadly grip. He had

not whispered the shameful and agonizing secret to any one—even to his friend Frank, and evidently it had not dawned upon the mind of his wife. But there it had been—an ever-present and growing horror; and he knew that his conversion had taken place just in time to save him from becoming a drunkard out and out.

Arthur told himself that the fact of his peril had been absolutely the secret of his own breast. This was, in some degree, a mistake. Previously to Arthur's conversion, Frank Livingstone, without having formed any positive suspicion, had become conscious of an uneasy impression that all was not right with his friend; and the remembrance of this feeling had rendered him the more anxious that Arthur should follow up his religious decision by signing the total abstinence pledge. But May had never dreamt that her husband's liking for strong drink was anything more than the relish of an ordinary moderate drinker, who can take his glass on occasion, and then refrain. Familiar as she had always been with the free use of intoxicating liquors,

it had never seemed to her that Arthur's drinking even bordered on excess; and his hint of peril to himself therefore had failed to make any serious impression on her mind. There could not, she told herself, have been any special meaning in his words. In what danger had he actually been? He had usually taken just one glass of beer at dinner, and another at supper. It was only now and then that he had indulged in a little whisky before going to bed. He had never taken very much wine. On no occasion had she seen him the worse for drink. In conclusion, May laughed—a little nervously, perhaps—by way of reassuring herself, and decided that Arthur had been thinking merely of the general danger which was supposed by some people to attend even a moderate indulgence in intoxicating liquor.

Arthur's significant words, therefore, had not diminished the regret of his wife that he had signed the pledge, or abated her desire that, by some means, she did not quite know what, that foolish act might be undone. In fact, while May was still far from having

resolved to make a definite attempt to induce Arthur to break the pledge, her desire that he might be released from the stigma it involved grew stronger day by day. It was a foolish vow, she continued to tell herself; and would be better broken than kept. And she let Arthur know that she had these thoughts. Sometimes she would speak in a bantering strain, and sometimes she would adopt an aggrieved tone. She did not actually ask her husband to drink, or directly suggest that he should violate his pledge; but there were few days on which she did not make some assault on his fidelity to his vow.

Arthur bore it, to all appearance, patiently enough. In his great love for May, he would have endured almost anything at her hands. Yet his spirit was sorely chafed; and the inward pain he suffered was rendered greater alike by his love for May, and by his persuasion that she was actuated, however mistakenly, by her love to him. To be angry with her was an impossible thing. And it was evident that she was not angry with him. She was grieved and mortified, but not angry.

And her way was so sweet. It was a jewelled dagger with which she wounded him from time to time; and it was wielded with a dainty hand. A more terrible temptress than this charming, loving wife there could not have been; and amidst his troubled thoughts and half-despairing prayers, Arthur wondered how long it would be before she would prevail.

The quick eye of his friend Frank was not slow to perceive in his face the signals of distress; and he used a freedom which no other friend would have ventured to take.

"Arthur, you are worried. Is there anything amiss at home? Is it about the pledge?"

They had met in the street as Arthur was going home to dinner. He averted his eyes.

"Thanks, old fellow," he replied, with a catch in his voice. "Don't trouble; it will be all right."

But his downcast eyes, his twitching mouth, his flushing cheek, belied his words. Frank formed a firm resolve. He would speak to Mrs. Vivian and that without delay.

The opportunity presented itself that very afternoon, in the course of which May came to make some small purchase in his shop.

"Take this watch along to Mr. Brown's, Tom," said Frank to his young assistant; and when the youth was gone, and even before May had been able to state her business, he leaned forward, and, in a quiet tone, spoke to her on the subject that was on his mind.

"Mrs. Vivian, there's something I should like to speak to you about before my young man comes back."

"Yes, Frank," said May, in some wonder; "my business can wait. What have you to say?"

"It's about Arthur. You know he is my dear friend. He seems to be troubled about something, Mrs. Vivian. Do you know what it is?"

May started and blushed.

"Do you think so, Frank? He hasn't said anything to me."

"No; and, if I am right in what I think, it is not likely that he will. He has not spoken to me either; but I don't think I'm mistaken.

I fancy it's about his pledge. Are you helping him to keep it, Mrs. Vivian? Are you sure you are not doing anything to make it more difficult for him to stand his ground?"

He was looking straight into her eyes, and they drooped before his steady, searching gaze.

"Forgive me, if I wound you," he said. "The matter is a delicate one, I know; but it is vital to Arthur's welfare, and your own. I, perhaps, Mrs. Vivian, have seen what has escaped your eyes; and I feel bound to warn you that, if your husband should break the pledge, it might prove an evil day for you and for little Dorothy."

May looked up for one moment.

"You are altogether mistaken, Frank," she stammered—"mistaken all round."

At this point the assistant came back, and nothing more could be said.

Frank Livingstone was not a married man. If he had possessed but a little of the special knowledge of womankind that matrimonial experience supplies, he would have known how unprofitable an experiment it almost invariably

proves to interpose between husband and wife. If any other man had spoken to May Vivian as Frank had done this afternoon, her anger would have been great. She was not angry with Frank; but the effect upon her of his words was the reverse of what he had hoped it would be. They kindled in her breast no sympathy with her husband in his stand against strong drink; and they rather served to increase than diminish her desire that—in some proper way, of course—what she persisted in regarding as his rash vow might be set aside.

Thus the weeks went by; and there came a time when May passed from taunt and ridicule to a sort of make-believe attempt to induce Arthur to drink—a very slight attempt at first, and to be taken seriously or otherwise as he might feel inclined.

Sometimes she would make little Dolly the medium of these half-jesting appeals.

"Don't you think, Dolly," she would say, as she sipped her stout, first glancing down upon the little one in her lap, and then stealing an arch, sidelong glance at her husband,

" that what is good for you and me would be good for Daddy too ? "

Or when, as was now and then the case, she fancied that she needed a little hot whisky and water before going to bed, she would sit in her chair by the fire, and look across at Arthur, seated on the other side, and say, as, with much clinking of the spoon, she stirred up the sugar in her glass :

" How can you let me have it all to myself, Arthur ? What an unsociable being you are. And don't you think my conscience needs the moral support of your comradeship, sir ? "

From jest to earnest is often but the briefest step ; and, on one of these occasions, May suddenly found herself seriously tempting her husband to share her treacherous draught. She had not intended any such thing. She had begun in her usual half-jesting way ; but, before she knew what she was about, she was holding the steaming glass to Arthur's lips, and entreating him to take "just one little sip."

His ear caught her altered tone, and he shrank back with an expression of horror in his face. Then, suddenly, May herself realized

what she was doing, and, with a laugh in which there was no merriment, hastily withdrew the glass.

It was a weary time for Arthur, and it told upon his health and looks. This was noticed by his friends, and they wondered what was wrong. Frank Livingstone saw it, and his suspicions gathered strength. May observed it, and set it down to abstinence from strong drink.

"It's all because of that hateful pledge," she said; and she actually derived a degree of secret satisfaction from Arthur's failing looks from the thought that they might furnish a plausible plea for the setting aside of his teetotal vow.

A crumb or two of comfort fell to Arthur now and then. His friend Frank gave him many a heartening word. And Daisy, dear little Daisy, did her best. Perceiving, with a child's quick intuition, how matters stood between Arthur and May, she had taken an early opportunity of assuring him of her sympathy and good will; and, whenever, in her presence, May made her mock attacks on

her husband's fidelity to his vow, the child would interpose with some gentle counteractive word. But Daisy was not always present. And as for Frank, his strong words seemed to lose all their point and force when Arthur looked into May's dancing eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

ARTHUR VIVIAN'S FATHER-IN-LAW.

THERE was another person who sympathized with Arthur's attitude towards strong drink, and she, strangely enough, was the mother of his wife. Mrs. Bancroft, in her slow, solemn way, completely disapproved of the liquor traffic; and the family connection with the trade was a constant burden to her conscience, and a grief to her soul. How it came to pass that, possessing such views, she had married a brewer, history does not relate. Possibly her love for Mr. Bancroft had, for the time being, blinded her to the iniquity of his business; possibly her conviction of its demerits had been the result of the intimate

acquaintance with it which her marriage had produced. However it may have been, it was understood by her husband and children that Mrs. Bancroft daily endured vexation of spirit, and indulged in much self-reproach, by reason of the fact that the family sustenance was derived from the manufacture and sale of strong drink.

It may be supposed that Mrs. Bancroft had originally given some sort of vocal expression to her views; but it was long since any actual protest against the family shame had passed her lips. She contented herself with assuming a more deeply solemn air, and becoming more expressively silent than usual at every mention, within the family circle, of the subject of intoxicating drink. Meanwhile, it was her constant resolve that she would derive no more benefit from what, to herself, she shudderingly called the "blood-money," on which the family lived than she was absolutely compelled to take. The spirit of Mrs. Bancroft was not that which makes a martyr of the first rank; but in her horror of the means by which her daily necessities were met, she practised, in

reference to food, clothes, and other matters of personal expense, the economy of an anchorite. She did not seem to expect that any other member of the household would share her views, or refrain from full participation in the benefits flowing from the lucrative source of the family income. She looked upon herself as a kind of scape-goat for the sin of the house.

When Mrs. Bancroft heard that the husband of her daughter had signed the total abstinence pledge, a gleam of joy tinged the cloud of gloom which perpetually brooded over her spirit. She took an early opportunity of taking Arthur aside and telling him how glad she was to hear of what he had done, and from that time she felt that she was no longer left to bear alone her partially vicarious burden of guilt and shame.

Arthur was thankful enough for the sympathy of May's mother; but it was hardly sufficient to outweigh the angry disapproval of her father. Mr. Bancroft had not ceased to be angry with Arthur for having signed the teetotal pledge; and not only so, he was also

beginning to be angry with May. He had assured her at first that he did not hold her responsible for what had taken place; but he was growing impatient because she had not yet, as he expressed it, "got the mischief put right." From time to time he questioned her as to whether her husband had "put that nonsense out of his head;" and on each successive occasion he received her negative reply with a blacker and yet blacker frown. These constant reminders of her father's anger did not cause any abatement of May's desire that, by some means, Arthur might be induced to set aside his pledge. At the same time, Arthur's consciousness of the fact that he continued to be the object of the contemptuous wrath of his father-in-law helped, in no small degree, to swell the tide which threatened to sweep away the good resolution he had formed.

There were times when Mr. Bancroft would speak to Arthur himself of his displeasure. He would give utterance to words of bitter protest. He would even argue, in a hectoring way, and, in so doing, he would assume

throughout that all the reason was on his side, and that anything Arthur might be able to say would scarcely be worthy of serious thought. Arthur would usually stand his ground as far as the argument was concerned, and it must be admitted that he had the best of it in that respect, but each successive encounter not only increased the anger of his father-in-law, but also left Arthur less able to meet the next attack.

Before Arthur had committed the outrage of signing the teetotal pledge, Mr. Bancroft had almost forgiven him for marrying May. Arthur was a bright, clever, amiable young fellow, with whom any one might have fallen in love; and he had gained so far upon the affections of his father-in-law, that Mr. Bancroft had fallen into the habit of paying occasional evening visits to his daughter and her husband in their cosy little home. Since Arthur's signing of the Temperance pledge, these paternal attentions had been discontinued; but some six weeks after that event, Mr. Bancroft so far repressed the indignation it had kindled in his mind as to turn his steps

once more, on a certain raw January evening, towards the street where the young couple lived. May received her father with delight; but the cordiality of Arthur's greeting was tempered with misgiving.

"This is like old times, father," said May, when, divested of hat and coat, Mr. Bancroft was duly installed in his accustomed easy-chair; and, as she spoke, she proceeded to mix, and set at her father's elbow on the table, a steaming glass of whisky and water.

"What will your husband say?" he asked in a sarcastic tone, as he took up the glass and raised it to his lips.

"Don't refer to me, sir," said Arthur, with a blush of annoyance. "I would not dictate to you. May knows that I don't put any restriction upon her in these matters, and I certainly should not dream of interfering with you."

"Ah," said Mr. Bancroft, holding up his glass between his eyes and the light, "that's very good of you, I'm sure. But you won't join me, I suppose? Haven't come to your senses yet, eh?"

"Yes, sir," said Arthur, "I hope I have. I'm afraid I was out of them before."

For a few moments Mr. Bancroft did not speak.

"Come now, young man," he said, presently, as he slowly, and with much relish, sipped his glass, "I've never had a fair account of your reasons for becoming a teetotaler." He spoke in a supercilious tone. "Why did you do this thing?"

"Partly, sir, for the sake of my example, and partly for my own safety."

Mr. Bancroft was so much startled by the second of these reasons that he entirely overlooked the first.

"Your own safety! Well, now, isn't that rather too good? You don't mean to tell me that you were ever in danger yourself of—of taking too much to drink?"

"I would rather not say anything more on that point, sir," said Arthur, with a slight blush.

Mr. Bancroft held very severe views on the subject of drunkenness; and the idea that his son-in-law had been in any danger of be-

coming a drunkard would have served only to deepen his disgust. But, on reflection, the idea was absurd.

"Come, now," he resumed, "you can't mean what you say. You surely might have taken your glass without overstepping the limits. Every sensible man can do that. Look at me, for instance."

Arthur looked, and saw a somewhat bloated purple face, discoloured and protruding eyes, and a figure all too stout. He wondered what his father-in-law might mean by "overstepping the limits."

"Yes, sir," he quietly said; "but I thought it best to be on the safe side."

How could he tell his contemptuous father-in-law more explicitly of the danger from which he had fled?

"Safe side! Well, if you stop when you've had enough, isn't that the safe side?"

"Yes, sir, if you always knew when you'd had enough. But there are those who never seem to know, or, if they do, they don't stop."

"Yes, but you're not that sort. A sensible

young chap like you needn't have signed the pledge to keep from drinking too much."

"Well, sir, I signed it because I thought it was the sensible thing to do."

Instead of replying to this, Mr. Bancroft reverted, after a brief pause, to the first of the reasons Arthur had given for having signed the pledge.

"But you talked about example. What do you think your example is going to do?"

"I have ventured to hope, sir, that it might be a help to some who are too fond of strong drink."

"Well, you needn't tell me that anybody who likes good liquor is going to leave off drinking it just because you happen to let it alone. And the majority of drinkers take it for no other reason than that they like it."

As Mr. Bancroft spoke, he sipped his glass with a relish which indicated that he belonged to the majority.

"No doubt you are right, sir; but I am not without hope that my example may help some of those very people to give up the drink—some who like it, I mean, and hate themselves

for liking it, and are thankful to any one who will give them a helping hand. And then, sir, don't you think anyhow that the example of a Christian man who drinks is likely to furnish the intemperate with an excuse ?"

"*Christian* man," exclaimed Mr. Bancroft, with a sarcastic emphasis on the word Christian, as though it were the object of his contempt. "You teetotalers would have everybody like yourselves. Perhaps, for instance, you would like me to sign the pledge."

The silence with which Arthur received this suggestion did not improve the temper of his father-in-law.

"No, sir," he concluded, in a loud tone, "put away all this confounded nonsense, and take your glass like a man."

As he spoke, he drained his glass, and rose to take his leave.

"Just a drop more before you go, father," said May; "it will keep out the cold."

"Thank you, my dear," he replied, holding out his glass. "You, at least, May, know what's good. A drop of real 'Scotch' is

a capital preventive medicine on a cold, raw night like this."

Mr. Bancroft drained his second dose of "medicine" at a draught. Then, his spirits rising as the liquor went down, he genially kissed his daughter, and bade her husband an almost cordial "good night."

The night was indeed thick and cold, and, as Mr. Bancroft stamped energetically along, he proceeded to beat his thickly gloved hands together for the purpose of forcing out the cold which his recent potations did not quite exclude. He was not aware that his breath, which came out thick into the murky air, was diffusing around him an odour indicative of the nature of his previous precautions against the cold; but the fact was speedily detected by an oldish man who stood swaying to and fro in front of him on the pavement, and who, judged even by Mr. Bancroft's own standard, would have been said to have "overstepped the limits" in relation to strong drink.

With drunken familiarity, the man held out his hand.

Mr. Bancroft stopped short in his walk.

"Now, my man," he began in a tone of authority; but, at this point, the man lurched up against him, still holding out his hand.

"I knows yer, Missr Bancroft. Shake hands with man as is fond glass o' beer—one o' yer own friends, Missr Bancroft."

Mr. Bancroft did not recognise his "friend," and he made an attempt to pass on.

"There, there, you're drunk, you know. A glass of beer is all very well, but you've had too much."

"Who's drunk?" demanded the man, with the combativeness of intoxication, which is no respecter of persons. "You're drunk yourself; I can smell it on yer."

"Me drunk," was the indignant and ungrammatical exclamation of Mr. Bancroft. "Take care what you say, my man, or I'll call the police."

"Wha' d' I care for p'lice?" was the reckless rejoinder. "Tain't often as I takes too much. You drink more'n I do, anyhow. Difference is, you takes it reg'lar, and I only has it nows and thens. I takes a lot all at once when I gets the chance; but you're

always a drinking and a guzzling. You drinks more nor me, but it don't take the same effect—not all at once. Don't talk to me."

The man actually seemed to be growing sober as he talked, and all at once he became sufficiently clear-headed to realise what he was about.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Bancroft, sir; no offence," he said, moving—still unsteadily—to one side, to let Mr. Bancroft pass.

Mr. Bancroft was speechless with indignation. For a moment he gazed after the retreating figure as it took its zig-zag course along the pavement; and then he turned towards home too much enraged to perceive the justice of the poor drunkard's words.

CHAPTER V.

A FATAL TRIUMPH.

DURING the past few terrible weeks Arthur had felt very much like a criminal under sentence of death, to whom the date fixed for his execution had not yet been made known. In his misery and despair, he had come to regard it as inevitable that he would be overcome by the beguilements of his loving, but grievously mistaken, wife. He told himself that, sooner or later, he would certainly break his pledge, and resume the habit of taking strong drink. How could it be otherwise? If May persisted in her attempt to induce him to set his pledge aside, how could he ultimately withstand her

will ? He had never denied her anything that it was in his power to give ; and he knew that he would not—could not—deny her even this. If her will had been the other way, how easy it would have been for him to stand his ground. If she had but left him to follow, unhindered by her, the course he desired to pursue, he might still have held on his way. But, since she was assailing his purpose with the full power which she derived from their mutual love, how was it possible for him to withstand ? Of course it was wrong for him to give way. He ought to have summoned to his aid the strength of Christian principle, and to have sought help from God in prayer. He did both. But he was a very young Christian, and there was his old liking for strong drink—a powerful advocate on the side of May. While he continued—less and less firmly—to resist the now unrestrained solicitations of his wife, he felt and knew that he would like to yield. He had found that the act of signing the pledge had not taken away his taste for intoxicating drink. The few drops of ink which had flowed from his pen upon the pledge card had not

quenched his terrible thirst—an ocean of ink would not have done it; and, at times, his longing to yield to the dire temptation which was presented to him in so many fascinating forms was fierce and strong.

About this time an event occurred which brought a brief respite to Arthur's harassed spirit. This was a visit paid to Arthur and May, towards the end of January, by Arthur's only sister, Edith. She and their mother were the only near relations Arthur could claim; and the two ladies lived together in a distant part of the country, on a small income which the father had left at his death, some years before. Edith Vivian was a small, but by no means despicable, person. In stature she was less than May herself. She was dark, and plump, and full of emphasis in all her ways. What she said she meant; and the light that glistened in her black eyes was an all-subduing beam. She was a sincere and very decided Christian, and gifted with an unusual measure of strong good sense. Arthur was his sister's junior by some three years, and her influence over him had always been great.

May had made the acquaintance of her husband's sister during the honeymoon, part of which had been spent at Arthur's home; and Edith's present visit was paid in fulfilment of a promise made at that time.

Edith held strong views on the Temperance question; and May's knowledge of this fact, combined with a degree of wholesome fear which had been produced in her by the pronounced personality of her sister-in-law, held her decidedly in check as long as Edith was in the house. For the time being, Arthur had complete relief. May took her own daily doses of stout, as usual, but she did not make any attempt, either by act or word, to induce her husband to drink. Arthur welcomed this temporary cessation of hostilities, but he knew that it was only a truce.

Another result of the visit of Edith Vivian to Barrowdale may be indicated at this point with the very lightest touch. It may be taken as a matter of course that she made the acquaintance of Frank Livingstone during her visit to the house of his friend, and the result was by no means of an unusual kind. Shortly

after their first meeting, both Frank and Edith discovered that they had supplied to history another instance of that interesting phenomenon—love at first sight. They both made the romantic discovery about the same time; but they parted at the conclusion of Edith's visit, each thinking that the other was unaware of the catastrophe which had taken place. Edith did not know of the great love with which she had inspired Frank, and Frank had no suspicion of the tenderness towards himself which nestled in Edith's heart.

Edith's visit was brief. For Frank, as may be supposed, it was all too short; and Arthur ardently wished it might have been indefinitely prolonged. After Edith's departure, May threw off the restraint her sister-in-law's presence had imposed, and renewed without disguise her efforts to induce her husband once more to taste intoxicating drink. She no longer made any secret of her desire and determination to persuade Arthur to break his pledge. To accomplish her purpose she employed every fascinating feminine art. Coaxing and banter, entreaty and reproach—all the artillery

of wayward love she brought to bear. The forces of Arthur's character made a last despairing effort to breast the sweeping tide which threatened to carry him away; but he was conscious, like some strong swimmer in his agony, that very soon he must succumb. When he was about to sign the pledge, he had told Frank Livingstone that he had no need to become a total abstainer for his own sake; but even then he had been far from feeling the confidence his words expressed, and now he fully realised how little was his strength. The fatal liking for strong drink, of which none but himself had known, was rendering him powerless in the evil day.

Frank Livingstone made such effort as he could to save his imperilled friend, but it was little he could do. He had derived his knowledge of the struggle in which Arthur was involved not from anything that Arthur had directly said, but from sundry unconscious signs which he had given; and Arthur's reticence had laid him under some restraint. Moreover, though his suspicions had grown very strong, he could not even now be sure that what he suspected

was actually the case. He was like one walking on a strange road in the dark, and was compelled almost to feel his way at every step. He made several delicate attempts to draw from Arthur some acknowledgment of his trouble, but without avail, and he found himself able to do little more than occasionally to give his troubled friend a helpful word. He did, indeed, venture to remonstrate with May once more, but she listened to his expostulation with such anger, and even scorn, that he was convinced it would be worse than useless to make further effort of that kind.

Daisy was more fully aware than Frank of what was going on. Being often at her sister's house, she was a frequent witness of the daily, and almost constant, endeavour of May to re-entangle her husband in the toils from which he was struggling to escape. Daisy was greatly distressed, and not once only, but many times, she made her simple but earnest sisterly protest. But it was only to provoke some sharp retort.

Once the child interposed by act as well as word. One evening May, in her fatal

eagerness to induce her husband to drink, had pressed her whisky glass against his lips. The strong fumes invaded his nostrils, drops of the seductive liquid wetted his lips. A strange light gleamed in Arthur's eyes. His face twitched, and his whole frame was convulsed. Another moment, and May's fearful victory would have been already won.

Daisy had just put baby to sleep, and, turning from the cradle, saw Arthur, as it seemed, on the point of drinking from the steaming glass. Quick as thought, she darted forward and seized the glass.

"Oh, Arthur, Arthur," she cried, "don't touch it! For shame, May! How can you be so wicked?"

A portion of the whisky was spilt upon the ground, but the glass was left in Daisy's hand. She placed it on the table, and, sitting down in the low nursing-chair, buried her face in her hands, and burst into tears.

May was struck dumb with surprise, and seemed inclined, at first, to resent Daisy's interference; but in the end she turned away with a laugh.

"You little goose," she said, "it was only a joke;" and she once more took her glass of whisky, and sat down in her chair.

"Oh, May, it's no joke to Arthur!" said Daisy, between her sobs.

Like Frank Livingstone's remonstrances, Daisy's well-meant interposition served only to strengthen May's determination to induce her husband to drink. And now her hope of success was high. One thing only, she thought, was needed to ensure an easy victory. If she could but hit upon some argument by means of which she might persuade her husband that there would be no sin in setting aside his pledge. What she sought came to her hand one morning in an unexpected way. She had been mending one of Arthur's coats, which he had left with her for the purpose before going to business. As she rose from her chair to put the coat away, at the completion of her task, a card slipped from one of the pockets, and fell upon the floor. She picked it up, and saw at a glance that it was the total abstinence pledge card which Arthur had signed. Regarding it with disfavour, yet

with a certain interest, she read the words of the pledge.

"I promise to abstain from all intoxicating liquors as a beverage."

Such were the words; and May pondered them deeply, as she sat with the coat over her knees, and the card still in her hand. "As a beverage." Ah, if she had only known that before! Here was her cue at last! Here was the weak place in her husband's armour. This was his vulnerable spot. Smiling quietly to herself, as she thought of the triumph already, she felt sure, within her reach, she returned the card to the pocket from which it had fallen, and put the coat away in its place.

That evening Arthur and May were alone. May knew that Daisy was detained at home with a sore throat. Arthur had arranged to go out, but a severe cold had decided him to stay at home. In fact, when he came in from the office, his cold was so much worse that May had insisted on his spending the evening indoors. So they sat together by the fireside, May with some knitting on which

she was engaged, and Arthur with a book. But he only read in brief snatches, for May was in high spirits, and poured out a rippling cascade of merry talk, in which her husband, well pleased to find her in so cheerful a mood, was nothing loath to join.

After supper, May turned her head towards the maid, as she was leaving the room with the tray.

"Mary," she said, "bring two glasses, and some hot water."

Arthur looked up with a smile.

"I'm going to give you a dose of medicine, dear," said May, with a bewitching smile.

Arthur regarded her with a doubtful face.

"What medicine, May?"

"Wait and see, dear," responded May, with dancing eyes.

The maid re-entered with the glasses and water, and May brought out the whisky, and proceeded to mix two portions, hot and strong.

"May, May, dearest!" cried Arthur, like one in mortal peril, "you know I mustn't drink it."

But he felt that he was as weak as water, and that his hour had come.

May placed the two glasses on the table, and came and stood before her husband with her hands behind her back.

"Now listen to me, Arthur, I've mixed your medicine, and you've got to drink it; but you're not going to break your pledge. I've seen your pledge card. It fell out of your pocket this morning, when I was mending your coat, and I know what it says. It binds you not to take strong drink as a beverage—that's all, Arthur. I'm not asking you to do that. I'm the doctor, and this is your medicine; and you've just got to drink it up."

She took one of the glasses, and, seating herself on his knee, put one arm around his neck, and with the other hand held the glass to his lips.

"Come, dear, your pledge allows you to take it, and it's the very thing you want."

She looked into his eyes, and knew that her victory was gained.

"For my sake, darling!" she murmured, with her lips against his cheek.

Her two allies—his great love for her, and his unquenched liking for the drink—fought for May, and she prevailed. Arthur took the glass with a feverish hand, sipped it once and again, and finally drained it to the dregs.

CHAPTER VI.

MAY BEGINS TO PAY THE PRICE.

AS soon as May had attained her end, she began to find that it was less worthy of attainment than she had thought. The wild, guilty pleasure she had felt in the pursuance of her purpose gave place, on its accomplishment, to an uneasy sense of insufficiency, and an oppressive foreboding of evil. Certain ominous questions loomed dimly on her mind. Had she done well after all? Was it, indeed, a wise or worthy thing to have persuaded her husband to take once more the treacherous drink which he had pledged himself never to taste again?

She continued to assure herself that, since Arthur had taken the whisky as medicine, he had not, in the taking of it, broken his pledge; but the frequency with which it was necessary for her to renew this assurance proved the emptiness of the plea. She knew that Arthur had broken his pledge. If, accepting her suggestion in good faith, he had taken the whisky believing that he might legitimately drink it as a medicine, on account of his cold, her purpose would not have been achieved. May knew full well that such was not the case; and she told herself that now Arthur's pledge need not bind him any more. This was the object for which she had striven so eagerly for many weeks. Yet its accomplishment afforded but little satisfaction to her mind. By dint of strenuous exertions, she had reached, and plucked, a Dead-Sea apple, and it was turning to ashes in her grasp.

Perhaps the chief cause of May's dissatisfaction was that her husband had fallen in her estimation through what she had persuaded him to do. She would have respected him more if he had refused, even at her entreaty,

to break his vow. And surely she felt some shame as she thought of the part that she herself had played with such evil success. As a matter of fact, all next day she could scarcely look her husband in the face. And Arthur? He too was bitterly ashamed, and was as little disposed to meet the gaze of his wife as she was to look into his eyes. They came down late, and Arthur had barely time to snatch a mouthful of breakfast and hurry off to business. They met at dinner; but the meal was a silent one.

Arthur realised even more clearly than May that he had broken his pledge. Her plea that he was at liberty to take strong drink as a medicine had not affected his judgment in the slightest degree. He knew it to be as light and empty as a bubble. He was aware that the cases in which alcohol may legitimately be taken as a medicine are very few. He did not for a moment deceive himself by supposing that such a case was constituted by his present cold; nor did he imagine that there was any probability of his having derived medicinal benefit from having drunk the

whisky which his wife had put to his lips. He had broken his pledge: that he knew to be the bitter truth. And he had done it because of his love for May, and the great power which her love to him enabled her to wield. It was not the plausible but flimsy subterfuge which May had advanced that had induced him at length to yield to her will. He had been overcome by her sparkling eye and wooing voice, by her soft encircling arm and the sweetness of her kiss; and he had yielded as one yields at last who has been worn and broken by the repeated attacks of a persistent and remorseless foe. And in yielding he had known that he was breaking his solemn vow, and delivering himself into the power of the evil thing.

Yes, Arthur knew that, having broken his pledge, he would not, henceforth, be bound by it any more than by a shattered chain. Having once more tasted the drink, he would drink again, and yet again. The smouldering fire in his veins had been revived, and was burning with a fierce and growing heat. If he could but have brought himself to confide

in his friend! But shame forbade—shame, and the desire to drink again; and when, on his way home to dinner, he stopped for a moment to exchange greetings with Frank, who stood at his shop-door, he gave him no hint of what had taken place. There was, Frank thought, a deeper shadow on Arthur's face that day, and a turning away of his eyes as though he could not bring himself to meet the gaze of his friend; but Frank did not suspect the actual truth. Or if, in his dire extremity, Arthur had but turned to God! Thus might he yet have been saved. If he could only pray! Alas, it seemed to him that he was incapable of prayer! A dreadful nightmare held his soul in its paralysing grip.

Arthur's desire for intoxicating drink was stronger than it had ever been before. Perhaps his long abstention had imparted to his appetite a keener edge; perhaps the deadly liquid had proved the more seductive because his signing of the pledge had rendered his tasting of it a greater sin than it would otherwise have been. In either case, all through that first

miserable day he longed to taste again the treacherous drink. The fragrant odour of the steaming whisky glass was in his nostrils, its taste between his lips. With a great effort, he restrained himself from entering the Star Hotel, as he passed and repassed it, in the course of the day, between the office and his home. Here he had formerly indulged in many a clandestine drink; and the desire to cross once more the familiar threshold was terribly strong. All the day he was thinking of the fatal draught of the night before, and longing for the evening that he might repeat it—a desire which filled him with shame and self-contempt.

The evening came. Arthur's cold was decidedly worse, and he again remained at home. The evening was spent, for the most part, in silence. May had her work; Arthur turned the pages of a book, and made pretence to read. Not many unnecessary words were spoken by either husband or wife; but each had a painful surmise of the other's thoughts. The nearest approach that was made to sociability was when May asked Arthur to hold a

skein of worsted for her to wind. He complied with the air of one who performs some grim function, and then silently returned to his reading. At supper-time he closed his book with but little knowledge of what he had read.

After supper, May looked at her husband, but did not propose another dose of the "medicine" of the night before. Arthur, though longing for it, and even resolved to have it, held his peace for the time. But the servant girl, having an observant mind, and being anxious to please, brought in, unbidden, hot water and two glasses, as on the previous evening. May looked furtively at Arthur; and, as he made no deterrent sign, again prepared for him a glass of whisky and water, after she had mixed one for herself. She still tried to believe that she was giving her husband medicine.

"You'll take it, dear?" she said, as she handed him the glass. "It'll be good for your cold."

"Yes, I'll take it," said Arthur, eagerly stretching out his hand; and there was a look in his eyes before which May for a moment

quailed—a look of fierce desire mingled with despair.

And now May began to pay the price of the victory she had won. By swift gradations, Arthur drifted back into his former habits in regard to strong drink. If he had stayed at that point, May would have congratulated herself on the result of her efforts, and have thought that all was well. But as, day by day, the taste for drink which she had succeeded in re-awakening in her husband, grew stronger and stronger, she began already to doubt the wisdom of what she had done. May was one of those people in whom the habit of drinking never grows beyond the point of so-called moderation. She was able to take her daily allowance of stout, with an occasional glass of whisky and water, without desiring to exceed. It was therefore with perplexity, as well as alarm, that she marked the daily growth of her husband's appetite for strong drink.

One day, at dinner, not long after the fatal night when he had broken his pledge, Arthur drank, of his own accord, the remaining portion

of May's bottle of stout, and, after doing this for a few days, he proceeded, habitually, to appropriate the entire contents of a bottle to himself. He followed this with the practice of taking a second bottle at supper; and, on the slightest pretext, he would have his glass of whisky also before going to bed. Nor was this the worst. May had good reason to know that the drink her husband took at home was by no means all he had during the day.

It was not long before Arthur's friends became aware that he had broken the total abstinence pledge and was taking heavily to drink.

Daisy was the first by whom the sad discovery was made. The sore throat by which she had been kept at home on the sad night when May gained her shameful victory had detained her indoors for a fortnight; and, by the time she paid her next visit to her sister's house, Arthur had fairly started on the downward road. At supper, to Daisy's horror, he took his bottle of stout, seemingly as a matter of course.

"Arthur," cried the child, in dismay, plac-

ing a tender hand on his arm, "what are you doing?"

"He's keeping me company," said May, with an uneasy laugh, taking up the word, "like a good husband."

Arthur laughed a dry, crackling laugh.

"But, oh," said Daisy, in her distress, "I don't understand. Arthur, dear, have you broken the pledge?"

"It can't be helped," said Arthur then, in gloomy tones.

"Mind your own business, Daisy!" exclaimed May, angrily.

Daisy, much agitated, rose from her chair.

"Oh Arthur, Arthur, don't take any more! You know what dreadful stuff it is. It isn't too late even now."

Her hands were on his shoulders, and her sweet face so full of tender pleading was looking into his.

Arthur hung his head, and did not speak.

"Sit down, Daisy," said May, fiercely, "and don't be a little fool!"

Daisy started as if she had been stung, and drew hastily back. Just then the baby awoke

and began to cry. Daisy, glad of the diversion, went over to the cradle, and when little Dolly was once more asleep, returned quietly to her chair. The remainder of the meal passed in silence ; and Daisy went home almost immediately, sorrowfully pondering in the depths of her tender heart whether there were any means by which Arthur might yet be saved.

The next night Mr. Bancroft paid one of his paternal visits—the first since Arthur had taken again to drink. He stayed to supper; and it was with very different feelings from those of Daisy that he made the discovery that his son-in-law had deserted the teetotal ranks.

"Ah," he said, as Arthur helped his father-in-law, and then himself, to a bottle of stout, "it has come to that, has it? I'm glad you've found your senses at last, young man. I congratulate you, May, my dear."

The gloomy silence in which Arthur received Mr. Bancroft's felicitations seemed to indicate that they were little more to his taste than the reproaches of Daisy had been.

Frank Livingstone, as a matter of course,

could not long remain ignorant of the downfall of his friend. If he had not been, at the time, more deeply engrossed in business than usual, the sad intelligence would have reached him sooner than it did. He had been conscious, for some time, of a growing suspicion that there was something wrong. Arthur had ceased to attend the meetings of the Band of Hope, and his place at chapel was vacant more frequently than not. For two or three weeks it had been evident that he was shunning his old friend; and on the rare occasions on which they met, Frank had detected in Arthur signs which would scarcely admit of interpretation in any way but one. At length Frank felt that he could no longer hold his peace.

Standing in the doorway of his shop, he waylaid Arthur one evening, as he passed, on his way home from the office.

"Arthur, what's amiss with you?"

"Oh, nothing!"

Frank put his hands upon Arthur's shoulders, and gazed steadily into his downcast face.

"Arthur, look up, and tell me the truth!"

"Well, I will; I've broken the pledge, and taken to drink."

"I feared as much. Oh, Arthur, my friend, I'm distressed for you!"

"Thanks, old fellow," said Arthur bitterly; "but it's of no use;" and he released himself from the loving hands that were still on his shoulders, and turned away.

"I shall look in this evening," Frank called after him, as he hurried off.

It was not till late in the evening that Frank arrived at Arthur's house. He found May sitting down to a solitary supper, and observed, with a pang, that there were two bottles of stout on the table.

"Arthur not at home, Mrs. Vivian?"

"No; he went out soon after tea; but I expect he'll soon be in now."

The remembrance still rankled in May's breast that this evening, almost for the first time since their marriage, Arthur had not told her where he was going when he went out. As a matter of fact, he had left the house for the purpose of avoiding the promised visit of his friend; and, at the present moment, he

was smoking and drinking in the billiard room of the Star Hotel.

"It's strange he should be out," said Frank; "he knew I was coming."

"Did he?" asked May in accents of surprise.

"Yes; didn't he tell you?"

"No," replied May with parched lips; and, in a moment, there dawned upon both May and Frank a glimmering of the reason why Arthur had gone out.

They were still standing by the supper table. May bethought herself and invited her visitor to take a seat.

"And won't you have some supper?" she asked.

Frank seemed neither to have seen the chair she had placed nor to have heard her voice. He looked sorrowfully into her eyes.

"Oh, Mrs. Vivian, what has come to Arthur?"

May's heart was already overcharged, and, at this simple question, she covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears. Frank had come prepared to speak words of stern reproach to this erring wife; but, at the sight of her distress, he was quite disarmed. The

opportunity of further speech was removed by an interruption as shameful as it was sad. The front-door was heard to open; there was a shuffling sound in the hall; and the next moment Arthur, in a state of almost helpless intoxication, reeled into the room.

CHAPTER VII.

HANDS STRETCHED OUT TO SAVE.

ADAM CLARKE is traditionally reported to have said that strong drink is first the devil's way into a man, and then the man's way to the devil. Whether or not tradition be correct in ascribing this dictum to the great commentator, there can be no doubt as to the truth of its words. There is no road by which the infatuated victim of sin may go to the devil more swiftly or surely than by the way of intoxicating drink.

This melancholy truth now received a pitiful illustration in the case of Arthur

Vivian, whose progress on the evil road was very swift. His craving for strong drink became fiercer day by day, until, at length, it grew to an overmastering passion. He felt, and knew, that the drunkard's madness had claimed him for its own. He knew it, and realised the horror and shame of the fact; and yet he was powerless in the grip of his foe. He was fully and intensely aware of the wickedness of continuing to drink, and of the misery which must result; and yet he continued to drink, and knew that he would not, and could not, refrain. He knew that it was the road to ruin on which he had set his feet—ruin which would involve, with himself, his wife and child, and yet he was powerless to stay his steps or turn aside.

We need not dwell upon the miserable record of the next few months. It was a time of growing wretchedness and shame for Arthur, and for May of misery and deep remorse. Deeper and deeper he sank into the loathsome depths, and one by one the links were severed which had united him to what was pure and good. He utterly

discarded the Band of Hope, and was seen no more in the house of God. He withdrew himself from such of his respectable associates as did not shun him of their own accord, and the man whom most of all he now dreaded to meet was Frank Livingstone, once his dearest, and still, as always, his most faithful friend. His haunts and associates were in accordance with the habits he had formed.

His shameful enslavement showed itself by many personal signs. He became untidy in his dress, and his former free and joyous air was gone. The devil that possessed him had already begun to write its sign-manual on his face and form. In his blood-shot eyes, pale and puffy cheeks, and dejected bearing, there was little reminder of the frank, handsome, gallant Arthur Vivian of former days.

Many hands were stretched out to save him, but without avail. He saw them as a man borne away by a furious torrent might see the outstretched hands of those who stood helplessly upon the river's bank.

As soon as it was known that Arthur Vivian had broken the pledge and taken to drink, his

fellow-members of the Band of Hope, amongst whom was the faithful Frank, made strenuous efforts for his rescue. They conferred about him, they prayed for him, they pleaded with him, they waylaid him in the street, they called for him on Band of Hope nights, they took him for walks, they invited him to their houses; in their anxiety to save him, they left no means untried. But all was alike in vain, and, one after another, these zealous people relinquished their efforts and dropped away, leaving Arthur to be whirled unhindered along the downward course.

All gave him up except Frank. Everything that the most devoted friendship could do was done by this most devoted friend. That Frank remonstrated with Arthur often and earnestly may be regarded as a matter of course. With intense solicitude he pleaded with his poor infatuated friend. By all the arts of affection he sought to allure him from the deadly path into which he had been drawn. He waited and watched for Arthur in the street, and, not once, but many times, arrested him on the fatal threshold of the Star

Hotel, and persuaded him to go home to his anxious and remorseful wife. He even, on one occasion, invaded the hotel itself, and, regardless of the jeers of its ribald company, brought his poor friend away by force from the very midst of that devils' den.

But Frank Livingstone was driven ultimately to acknowledge to his aching heart that all his efforts were in vain. The utmost he could do was to administer a temporary check now and then to the evil current which was carrying his friend away; and when the brief restraint was over, the fierce tide swept him more swiftly downward than before.

At length it occurred to Frank that another influence might be successful where his own had failed. He would see the minister, and induce him to intervene. In the carrying out of this resolve, Frank Livingstone became unconsciously instrumental in the rescue of another of the victims of intemperance beside the friend whose deliverance he sought.

The chapel to which Frank was attached was in charge of the younger of the two ministers of the Barrowdale circuit, who was

a man of between thirty and forty years of age, with several little children and an ailing wife. Looking out at his study window one morning, he saw Frank Livingstone coming up the path of the small front garden and approaching the door of the house. Quick as thought, he snatched from the table an empty glass, and hid it in a cupboard which was let into the wall beside the fireplace. A few minutes later, there was a knock at the study door, and the expected visitor was shown in. On entering the room, Frank started and almost recoiled. Was it fancy, or could it be an odour of spirits that pervaded the room? A moment's reflection was sufficient for the dismissal of the preposterous thought.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Mr. Henley," said Frank, as he accepted the minister's invitation to take a seat, "but my business is most important, and I'm sure you will not begrudge a few moments of your time."

"I am quite at your service, Mr. Livingstone," said the minister, with evident nervousness, as he seated himself in his swivel writing chair, and turned towards his visitor.

"I have come to see you, sir," resumed Frank, "about my friend, Arthur Vivian. You are no doubt aware that he has taken to drink, and is going to the bad at a great speed. I have done all I can to save him, and seemingly to no purpose. But, sir, I cannot let him go, and I want to ask if you will help me to save him. Perhaps he would listen to you, and your influence might prevail."

The minister had listened in silence. Hot thoughts of shame were scorching his mind. He moved uneasily in his chair, and sat with downcast eyes.

"I am sorry to hear what you say," he said in low tones. "I've known something of this about young Vivian, but I did not know it was so bad. I—I'll do what I can."

Frank noticed with surprise the confusion of Mr. Henley's manner; but, after a little further discussion, he thanked him and took his leave.

Left to himself, the minister brooded for some moments in his chair. That he of all men should be asked to attempt the rescue of

a victim of drink—he who had yielded himself to the same base snare! Secretly, without the knowledge even of his wife, he had drifted by degrees into the habit of taking, on various pretexts, frequent doses of whisky. At one time he felt bilious, at another he had a cold, and at another a touch of neuralgia formed his plea. At length he had persuaded himself that a drop of whisky, midway through the morning, helped him in his studies, and he ultimately ceased to cast about for pretexts, and took his daily quantity of the treacherous stimulant as a matter of course.

Surely this Christian minister had been blind; but now the appeal of Frank Livingstone had opened his eyes. He saw his shame and peril in a vivid light. His fatal habit could not long be hid. He often wondered that his wife had not detected it long ago. He was conscious of its effects, and they must soon make themselves evident to other people beside himself. Groaning out an anguished prayer, he rose from his seat, and took from the cupboard a bottle half full of whisky, and, having glanced at it for a

moment, placed it under his coat and left the room.

Beyond the minister's back garden, and separated from it by a low wall, was a canal. The towing path was on the other side, and the water almost washed the garden wall. Standing there as though in meditation, the penitent minister quietly dropped the bottle, with its seductive contents, into the canal, and swiftly returned to his study. From that time he drank strong drink no more.

Intense as was Frank's solicitude for Arthur, it was fully equalled by the distress of Daisy, and it was her constant thought that in some way Arthur must be saved. The very first time she had the opportunity, she took him to task for breaking his pledge, and poured out her tender and loving soul in distressful remonstrance.

"How could you do it, Arthur?" she said.

Arthur at first turned her loving questions off with a laugh, then he took refuge in silence, and then, to Daisy's inexpressible grief, he avoided meeting her whenever he could.

"Never mind, Arthur," she said, simply, "I

can pray for you at least. You can't prevent that."

Yes, she could pray, and there was something more that she could do. One evening, when she had been having tea with May, Arthur did not come home at what had formerly been his usual time.

"Arthur is late," said Daisy, as the timepiece on the mantel rang out the hour of seven.

"That's nothing new," responded May, with a pathetic attempt at cheerfulness.

"Oh! are they so busy at the office?"

"Yes—no," gasped May, with a hand upon her heart.

Daisy's quick intuition divined something of the truth, which became still clearer to her when, an hour later, Arthur came home unmistakably under the influence of drink. This was only a week or two after her discovery of the fact that Arthur had broken the pledge, and it was the first time she had seen him in such a state as this.

The next evening, when Arthur came out of the office, he found Daisy waiting at the door.

"Come along, Arthur," she said, putting a loving little hand upon his arm, and, before he knew what was taking place, he was walking homeward along the street, with Daisy chatting gaily by his side. As they passed the Star, he tried to disengage his arm.

"I have a man to see in here, Daisy."

"No," said Daisy, tightening her hold upon his arm, "I don't think you have; but there's some-one waiting for you at home."

"Is there? Who?"

"Why May, of course--and little Dolly! Come along!"

"There, May," said Daisy, a few minutes later, as she pushed Arthur into the room, where his wife was listlessly preparing his tea, "he has come home at the proper time to-night, like a good boy."

After this, Daisy made a practice of waiting for Arthur in the evening, whenever she could, and bringing him safely home. But with all her loving care, she could not charm away his craving for drink. If he was baulked at one time, he would have his way at another, and often, after Daisy had seen him home, and

left him, as she thought, to spend the evening quietly with his wife, he would slip out again on some specious pretext, leaving May alone with her aching heart.

It was not every hand that was stretched out to save. Mr. Bancroft, having heard with disgust of the intemperate habits his son-in-law had formed, took him contemptuously to task; and, having met him in the street in a state of intoxication, forbad him his house, and discontinued his own visits to Arthur and his wife.

It seemed to May that her cup of wretchedness was almost full, but she was not aware of the bitterness the future had in store.

CHAPTER VIII.

LITTLE DOROTHY.

LONG ago May had bitterly repented of having persuaded Arthur to break his pledge. If she had but counted the cost before embarking on her mad enterprise! How differently would she have acted if she had known what its result would be! She would have signed the pledge herself, and would have helped Arthur with all her might. But now it was too late, and she must pay the terrible price.

One result of Arthur's excessive indulgence in strong drink was that May's fondness for it

left her entirely. Her liking for the evil thing was changed to loathing and hate. One day, at dinner, Arthur noticed that she was not taking her usual glass of stout.

"Why don't you have your stout?" he said, glancing gloomily towards her—how long it was since she had seen one of his old sunny looks!

"I can't drink it any more, Arthur," said May, with a catch in her breath. "I've got to hate it. And, oh, if you would but give it up too, and put an end to all this misery!"

"You should have thought of that before," was Arthur's grim reply. He did not mean to be brutal. He was never quite himself now. Then, the retort in itself was just. In that fact, rather than in the apparent unkindness of the speaker, consisted the keenness of its edge; and it went to May's heart like a knife. Too much broken for violent demonstration of grief, she leaned her head upon her hand on the table, and shed silent, piteous tears.

Almost the only consolation left to May

was in little Dorothy. The child had just completed her first year. She had cut several of her teeth, was beginning to find the use of her tongue, and seemed likely soon to be upon her feet. The joyous little creature, all unconscious of evil, nestled very near her mother's poor bruised heart. As for Arthur, the besotted passion which possessed him seemed to have quenched alike, within his breast, love for his wife and interest in his child.

The weary and miserable months rolled on. Summer came and went, autumn followed, and it was winter once more. A full year had now passed since Arthur, persuaded by his wife, had broken the Temperance pledge. Great and sad was the change that year had wrought. Sad was the alteration in Arthur; grievous the ruin of his happiness, and that of his wife; pitiful the wreck of their home.

As in so many other cases, so in that of Arthur Vivian, the sin of intemperance proved the parent of other sins. Amongst the rest, the vices of betting and gambling had claimed

him for their prey. The result was that he was always short of money, and gave May less and less for household purposes, from time to time. May wondered, amidst her many troubled thoughts, where all her husband's money went. He surely did not spend it all in drink! Meanwhile they were reduced to straits. May was compelled to resort to many painful economies, and was even driven into debt. She was confronted, at length, with the necessity of dismissing her maid. But the girl anticipated her mistress, and took the matter into her own hands.

After she had taken the breakfast things out one morning she returned to the room.

"Please, ma'am," she said, "may I speak to you a moment?"

"Yes, Mary," replied May, listlessly; "what is it?"

"I want to give a month's notice, please."

"Why so, Mary? Is the work too hard?"

"Oh, no, ma'am, it's not that."

"Then is it—" May hesitated—"that you want more money?"

"No, ma'am: I hardly like to tell you what it is. It's—it's—well, it's the master; I can't stand his goings on."

A flash of May's former spirit revived, and kindled her pale face.

"What complaint have you to make of your master, Mary?" she demanded, with as much dignity as her bruised heart would allow her to assume.

"None for myself, ma'am; it's you as should complain. Master don't often speak to me, either good or bad. It's these ways with the drink that I can't abide."

The flame of May's indignation sank into the dead heat of shame.

"Very well, Mary," she said, wearily; "then you leave this day month."

So Mary worked out her month, and left; and May did not engage another maid.

On the evening of the day on which the girl left, Arthur came home fairly sober for once. He had been out most of the evening, and, coming in at supper-time, found May setting the table.

"Where's the girl?" he asked.

"She's left, Arthur. Don't you remember that I told you she was going?"

"I believe you did. What did you say she was leaving for?"

May had not told him this before, and she could not now.

"She has her reasons, no doubt. But she must have left, in any case. We can't afford to keep a servant any longer."

As they sat by the fire after supper, that night, May ventured to ask Arthur for a little money.

"You have kept me very short of late, Arthur," she pleaded, with her hand upon his knee. "How can I buy what we want, if I have so little money?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I have precious little myself."

"Arthur, dear, give me a few shillings; we're in debt all round!"

"I haven't a red cent, May," said Arthur, "and that's the truth. Do you think," he added, bitterly, "that I should have come home to-night as I am, if I had had any money left?"

"Oh, Arthur, where does all your money go?"

"Well, it's pay day to-morrow," said Arthur, evading May's distressed question, "and you shall have some then."

May knew that this meant that he would give her perhaps half enough to keep them going for the month.

The habits into which Arthur had fallen could not be concealed from his employers. More than once they had admonished him in very serious terms, and, on the day following the conversation just recorded, they gave him, in handing to him his month's money, what they assured him was the last warning he would receive. They had borne with him, they said, for the sake of his past services, and because they wished to give him every chance, but it would be impossible for him to remain in their employment unless his behaviour underwent a speedy change.

Arthur listened to these ominous words with a sullen and downcast air, and left the office without making any reply. What reply could

he make? Promises of amendment would be idle breath. He knew that he would not amend, and his dismissal was only a matter of time.

Arthur and May had passed a miserable Christmas, and now the new year was some few weeks upon its way. Each previous Christmas Day they had spent at the house of May's father. This year they had passed it wretchedly in their own cheerless home. May herself might have joined the family party, but she would not go without Arthur, who, she knew, would not be received. So she stayed at home for her husband's sake, and he rewarded her by going out after dinner, and returning towards midnight in the shameful state in which she had grown so sadly accustomed to see him come home.

The Christmas season had teemed with temptations, and it had left Arthur more completely enslaved to intoxicating liquor, if possible, than ever. He had reached the stage at which he must have drink at any cost. His base craving swallowed up the

greater part of his earnings, and nearly all the rest was flung away at the gaming table. If it had not been for the interest on a little money which May possessed in her own right, she would not have been able to procure the barest necessities of life. When Arthur's money was gone, he would resort to the pawn shop. He had thus disposed of his watch and chain, and other articles of value belonging to himself. He had even pawned some of his wife's jewellery, a fact of which, though he did not think it, May was fully aware. He would drink with any one who would treat him, and he would drink anywhere. Sometimes he went to the Star, but not often now. By the inevitable law of social gravitation, he had drifted down to less reputable haunts. A few streets from his own door, there was an evil-looking public-house where he would sit and drink night after night till closing time; and by some means May had come to know that this was his usual place of resort.

Hitherto May had always waited quietly at home till her poor self-dishonoured husband

came in; and then, with a fiercely throbbing heart and burning tearless eyes, had got him up to bed as best she might. But one night, early in February, she departed from her usual course. The weather was cold, and wet, and wild. The wind moaned in the chimney, lashed the window panes in fierce rainy gusts, and made weird noises up and down the house. May sat by the fire, in her desolation, till she could endure herself no longer. She and Dorothy would go and try to find Arthur and bring him home. Perhaps, when he saw them, he would have pity, and come.

Putting on her mackintosh and a closely-fitting cap, she wrapped little Dorothy in a thick shawl, and, holding the child against her breast, went out into the wild night. She turned towards the public-house which had been lately her husband's place of resort. Its sign was the "Dog and Pheasant," and it was some five minutes' walk away. It stood in one of the meaner streets, and had no good name. A glare of light streamed through the red blind which shaded its window, and

a clamour of voices came out at the partially open swing doors. A sudden keen perception of her pitiful situation sent a chill to May's heart. She had seen pictures of wretched women haunting the doors of public-houses in the hope of persuading their besotted husbands to come home. That she should be such an one! For a moment the horror of the thought almost made her heart stand still. But she shook off the impression; and, pressing her child more closely to her breast, she pushed open the swing door, and passed into the narrow lobby within. At her right hand she found another door, which she could not doubt was that of the room where the drinkers sat. With a wild effort, she pushed it open, and through the hot, evil-smelling, garish atmosphere, she saw her husband's face, and faintly pronounced his name. By Arthur she was neither seen nor heard; and to any other occupant of the room the appearance of a woman's haggard face in the doorway would not seem to be a circumstance worthy of remark. The miserable wife did not call to her husband a second

time, and it was impossible for her to enter that loathsome den. Feeling sick and faint, she drew hastily back, and staggered into the street.

Having ascertained that Arthur was actually in the house, she would wait till he came out. She had begun to walk to and fro on the wet pavement, still holding her sleeping child—though scarcely conscious of her burden, in the miserable preoccupation of her mind, when the door of the public-house was violently forced open from within, and two men, fiercely quarrelling, staggered out upon the pavement. One of the combatants was Arthur. With a low cry, May rushed forward at the moment when his antagonist launched a furious blow. It was meant for her husband; but it struck the head of her child. Sick with horror and dread, she gathered little Dorothy more closely within her arms, and, placing a hand on Arthur's wrist, succeeded in drawing him away. How she reached home she never knew. While she supported her drunken husband with one weary arm, her child lay heavy as lead upon the other. When at last she had gained the house,

and had deposited her husband on the couch, she turned to look into the face of her child. One frightened glance and then another full of growing dread, and then she uttered shriek after shriek. Little Dorothy was dead.

CHAPTER IX.

HOPING AGAINST HOPE.

IT was too true. The drunken blow aimed at Arthur outside the tavern door had killed his child. It was almost as though his own hand had done the frightful deed.

Let us draw a veil over the anguish of the young mother on making her dreadful discovery, and the remorse of the wretched father when he at length became fully conscious of what had occurred.

As a matter of course, an inquest was held; but little information could be gathered concerning the facts of the case beyond what May was able to supply. Arthur's memory was a

blank; and all that those who had been inside the public-house at the time could tell was that Arthur and the man who had given the fatal blow had quarrelled in some trivial argument, and then staggered together into the street. The man was a stranger; and it was not known whence he had come or whither he had gone. Efforts were made to trace him; but it could hardly be otherwise than that they should fail, and the coroner's jury brought in a verdict of manslaughter against some man unknown.

Little Daisy's funeral was conducted by Mr. Henley, as being the minister of the chapel which Arthur had formerly been accustomed to attend. The only mourners at the grave-side were Arthur himself and the ever faithful Frank. May was too much crushed in mind and body to face the ordeal; and Daisy and their mother kept her company at home.

When the service was over, Frank clasped Arthur's hand.

"You'll give it up now, Arthur?" he said, with a yearning look.

Arthur turned his haggard eyes for a moment towards the face of his friend, but made no reply. In his trembling frame and besotted face there was little indication that even now he would be able to form a strong resolution, much less to carry it out.

"Arthur, my poor friend, God will give you strength!"

As they turned to leave the cemetery, Mr. Henley shook Arthur by the hand, and spoke a few sympathetic words. Now, thought the minister, the opportunity of fulfilling his promise to Frank had come.

"I shall be at home to-morrow evening, Mr. Vivian. Will you come and have a bit of supper with me?"

Arthur would have declined; but he had no excuse at hand, and a look of deep solicitude from Frank produced its effect. He accepted the minister's invitation, and then turned homeward with his friend. He readily divined that the minister wanted to have a talk with him about the drink. He was not averse to being talked to on that subject just now. The horror of what had occurred had at least

rendered him willing to be shown a way by which he might break loose from the dominion of the drink. But he assured himself that there was no such way. He had always liked Mr. Henley, and would hear what he had to say; but it would be of no use.

The following evening, at the time appointed, Arthur presented himself at the minister's door.

"Mrs. Henley is away from home, and the children are in bed," said the minister, "so we shall have a bachelor supper."

There was a cheerful fire in the grate; an appetizing little supper stood ready on the table; and the minister was cordiality itself.

During the meal nothing was said on the subject of strong drink; but afterwards, when the table had been cleared, and the chairs were drawn up to the fire, Mr. Henley addressed to his visitor some very faithful words. In all that he said there was no suggestion of condemnation or reproach; but very tenderly—for he remembered his own shame and peril—he pointed out to Arthur the folly and wickedness of his conduct, reminded him of the miseries it had already

produced, and warned him of the further woes which would certainly ensue.

"My dear friend," he said, leaning forward and putting his hand on Arthur's knee, "let me beg you to stop before it is too late."

Arthur shook his head.

"It's too late now."

"No, not yet! A strong effort, and trust in God, will yet pull you up."

Arthur was silent. There was a grim absurdity in the suggestion that he should make a strong effort; and as for trusting in God, alas, he had long lost the power to do that!

There was a conflict in the minister's mind. He had intended to tell Arthur of his own victory over the drink, but was hesitating now that it had come to the point. At length he succeeded in bracing himself for the effort.

"Let me give you a bit of my own experience," he began, in a low tone; and then he told Arthur the story of his own peril and deliverance, and related how he himself had been caught in the fatal snare of strong drink,

and drawn to the very edge of the gulf into which Arthur was falling now, and how, by the help of God, he had thrown off the deadly spell. In telling his story he did not spare himself. The only particular he concealed was the fact that he had been led to realize his sin by the request of Frank Livingstone that he would exert himself to save Arthur from the drink.

"That is my story," he said, when he had concluded his confession; "and there is deliverance for you in the same way."

Again Arthur shook his head.

"You were not like me," he said.

"I soon should have been; and the power that helped me is strong enough to help you, and would be so if your case were even worse than it is."

Arthur sat silent, with downcast eyes.

"Come" pleaded the minister, "won't you promise to try?"

Still there was no response.

"Think of all that is at stake!" urged Mr. Henley.

Ultimately, for the purpose of putting a

period to the minister's importunity, Arthur muttered something that might be construed into the promise he was being urged to make.

"You won't object," said the minister, "to our praying together before you go?"

"It will be of no use," said Arthur, kneeling down by his chair.

"Now," said Mr. Henley, when they had risen from their knees, and Arthur was preparing to leave, "go home, and tell your wife what you mean to do."

It can hardly be said that Arthur had any real intention of carrying out the promise he had given, or that the minister had understood him to give. His moral sense had become so far weakened by his prolonged indulgence in strong drink that he was capable of promising what there was little prospect that he would be able to perform; and he did not really intend to relinquish his drinking habits, because he told himself that their hold upon him was too strong to be thrown off. The utmost he proposed to do was to adopt the former part of the minister's advice, and go straight home. But even this intention proved

more than he was able to carry out. His homeward way led past the door of a familiar public-house; and its attractions proved more than he could resist. His steps slackened, he paused upon the fatal threshold; and, with no more power to resist than is possessed by a chip caught in a furious eddy, he was swept within the inviting doors.

After this, Arthur soon yielded himself once more to the full power of the drink. The hopes raised in the minds of his friends by his comparative sobriety during the few days immediately succeeding the tragic death of his child were utterly dashed to the ground. Frank Livingstone had taken the opportunity afforded by this season of sorrow to make one more appeal to his enslaved friend; and he was daring to hope that he might prove not to have spoken in vain. May, in the anguish of her soul, was hoping against hope. The minister was assuring himself that the effort he had made would not turn out to have been quite in vain. But complete disappointment awaited them all; and within a few weeks of the death of little Dorothy, Arthur had

abandoned himself to the accursed appetite which held him captive more completely than ever.

And now another great calamity befell him. The blow descended with which Arthur had been threatened so long, and he was dismissed from the service of his employers. In giving him the usual month's notice, they told him that they had decided to take that step just at the time when his baby was killed, but had refrained from doing so, at that time, in the hope that so sad a result of his dissolute habits would bring him to his senses, and induce him to amend his ways. As, however, it had proved otherwise, they had now no choice but to ask him to consider himself under notice to leave their service at the end of the month. This was said with all kindness, but firmly; and Arthur knew that his doom was sealed.

The end of the month came all too quickly, and Arthur found himself out of employment, and almost entirely without means.

"Arthur," said May, in despair, when he came home from the office for the last time, "what are we to do?"

"I don't know," was the reckless reply; "and I don't care. I shall go to the devil; and you can go back to your father."

Arthur took a long stride further toward the destination he had assigned to himself, by spending almost the whole of his last month's salary in intoxicating drink, which had now become the one necessity of his life.

Arthur's loss of employment, coming as the consummation of the miseries he had brought upon himself and his wife, involved them at once in almost extreme poverty, and necessitated their immediate removal to a smaller and meaner house. Meanwhile, Arthur, urged by May, and spurred on by the consideration that without money he could not obtain drink, bestirred himself to seek employment. For a long time he was not able to obtain anything like a regular situation. He merely managed to secure occasional employment at such work as he could do with his pen. But ultimately he was engaged by a drunken butcher, whom he had met at a public-house, to keep his books, at a salary of a few shillings a week.

May was reduced to the utmost straits. A very scanty portion of Arthur's earnings found its way into her hands; and, if it had not been for her own few pounds, she would have been almost completely without money. It was some relief to the situation that Arthur had but little desire for food. But notwithstanding this, her purse was light enough after the rent was paid. In short, she was reduced almost to the lowest point of destitution. Black despair entered her soul; and there were times when she was even thankful that her precious little Dorothy had been taken from the evil—present, and to come.

When May considered the ability of her father to supply all her necessities, it rendered her trials doubly hard to bear. But Mr. Bancroft made no sign. Surely he did not understand! Yet he knew that Arthur had lost his situation. At last she summoned courage, and crept, in her shame and misery, to her father's house.

"Father," she said, "I'm destitute, and always hungry. Give me some help."

"You may come home, if you like," said

Mr. Bancroft, coldly; "but you will not touch a penny of my money as long as you stay with that drunken beast of a husband of yours. What do you say?"

"Oh, father, I cannot leave him!" cried May, piteously; and then she crept back again to her wretched home.

May's mother, however, guessed the object of her visit, and divined its result; and the next day she called and gave May a few shillings—all she could spare—from her private purse. May broke down, and wept upon her mother's breast.

"I haven't said anything to your father. He'd be angry, if he knew," and the nervous lady hurried away.

Daisy still continued her practice of frequently spending the evening with her sister; and one night, just before leaving, she blushingly took out her purse, and slipped two sovereigns into May's hand.

"It's some of my pocket-money that I've saved," she said; "but I don't want it."

"Oh, Daisy," protested May, in choking tones, "I can't take it."

"But you must," was the emphatic retort. "I shall throw it away if you don't."

So May was constrained to accept the generous gift; but she told herself that not a penny of the money should be spent.

CHAPTER X.

EDITH TO THE RESCUE.

FRANK LIVINGSTONE still mourned over his fallen friend, and took every opportunity of showing compassion towards the broken-hearted wife. He had long ceased to entertain the idea of addressing May in the tone of reproach. The price she had already paid for her folly was penalty enough, and no amount of upbraiding would have rendered her more deeply conscious than she was of the mischief she had done. Frank's one feeling with regard to May was pity, and it was his constant endeavour to afford her such help as the distressing circumstances of the case would

permit; and, as a matter of fact, May derived no little comfort from the sympathetic and delicate attentions of her husband's wise and faithful friend.

With regard to Arthur himself, Frank's resources seemed to be at an end. He would have put forth the utmost effort, and have made almost any sacrifice, to save the friend whom he still loved as his own soul. There was scarcely any price which this Christian young man would not have been willing to pay for the joy of leading Arthur Vivian back to the paths of sobriety and good repute. But he could not think of any method for the accomplishment of this purpose which he had not tried and tried again, and the persistency with which Arthur continued to avoid him, rendered it doubly difficult for him to try any method at all. Frank had counted greatly on the intervention of the minister, and now that even his influence had been exerted in vain, it seemed that indeed all hope was gone. It was while Frank was thinking of this one day, that he was reminded of another person who might succeed where even the minister had

failed. There was no one who had more influence with Arthur than his sister Edith. For his part, Frank admitted to himself that there were not many things which that young lady could not have induced him to do, and the more he thought about it, the more firmly he became convinced that there would be great hope for Arthur, if his sister would but take him in hand.

Frank wondered how much Edith and her mother knew of Arthur's recent course of life. He conjectured that they had been kept largely in the dark, and, on venturing to question May, he found that this was actually the case. They had been told of the death of little Dorothy, but had not been fully informed of the circumstances under which it had occurred, and, though they knew of Arthur's loss of his situation, they were ignorant as to its cause. Frank asked May, in as delicate a manner as he could, whether she did not think Arthur's mother and sister ought to be told the true state of the case. May hesitated a moment, and then said, in the spiritless way in which she had always spoken of late, that

she had often thought Edith and her mother ought to know about Arthur, but she had not had the heart to tell them. It was indeed natural that she should wish to hide a wound like hers, and perhaps Arthur's relations were the last persons for whose scrutiny she would have been inclined to lay it bare.

"Well," said Frank, "it's quite my opinion that they ought to be told, and I think"—he spoke with a hesitation which, but for the fact that she was preoccupied with her ever-present sorrow, May could not have failed to observe—"if only Miss Vivian were to come, she might—— What do you think, Mrs. Vivian? Will you write and tell her as much as you can? She might be left to take her own course then."

May shook her head.

"Will you write for me, Frank?"

"I? Oh, Mrs. Vivian!" cried Frank, aghast at the suggestion.

"Yes, Frank," said May, at a loss to account for his reluctance, "if you only would—in my name, you know."

Frank reflected, and, quickly deciding that

it was his duty to comply with May's request, wrote to Edith Vivian a discreet, earnest letter, telling her the sad truth about her brother, and begging that, if she could do anything to save him, she would act without delay.

Though Edith and her mother had not been aware of the actual truth with regard to Arthur, they had, for various reasons, suspected, for some time, that all was not right, but when they learnt, from Frank Livingstone's letter, how far their gravest suspicions came short of the truth, their distress was very great. But they did not give themselves to unavailing grief. The practical, strong-willed Edith decided at once that, by some means or other, her brother must be saved. Her mind was divided between Arthur's peril and her mother's need.

"My dear," said her mother, "you must go."

"But, mother, how will you do?"

"As I can, and well enough. But, at any cost, the poor boy must be saved."

So Edith wrote to May proposing to go to

Barrowdale on a short visit. May readily assented to the proposal, and, at her suggestion, Edith wrote to Arthur, saying that she was coming to see them, and that they might expect her on the following day but one.

"You must take care that your being there doesn't cost them anything, Edith," said her mother.

"Trust me for that, mother," said the emphatic Edith. "I shall have to exist somewhere, and it won't cost me any more to pay for my living there than to pay for it at home."

Edith's letter was waiting for Arthur on the chimney-piece when he came home to dinner, and it made him angry.

"She might have waited till she was asked," he exclaimed, flinging the letter down on the table.

"Arthur," May ventured to say, "she is your own sister!"

"What of that? She isn't wanted; we don't want anybody."

He sat down to the table in moody silence, but presently he looked up darkly at his wife.

"This is your doing—about Edith—I expect!"

"I didn't ask her to come."

"You didn't tell her not to, anyhow."

"No, Arthur; I couldn't do that. You won't forbid her to come, will you? If you only knew how much I want some one to comfort me!"

"It's all your own doing. You'd have saved yourself a lot of trouble if you'd only let me alone when I signed the pledge."

Arthur did not often reproach May like this, but when he did, she could only answer him with tears of grief and shame.

"I think I shall wire to her not to come," said Arthur, as he rose from the table at the conclusion of the meal.

"Oh, Arthur, don't do that!" exclaimed May, starting up and catching at his arm.

"Let me alone!" was the angry retort; "I shall do as I like;" and roughly jerking his arm from her grasp, he brought his elbow in violent contact with her face.

May sank back, half fainting, into her chair, and Arthur strode hotly from the room,

without staying to ask whether she was hurt. He left the house with the intention of despatching a telegram at once to Edith, forbidding her to come. But, on his way to the post office, he met his friend and employer, the bibulous butcher, who drew him into a public-house, where he remained drinking, partly at the expense of the butcher, and partly at his own, for the rest of the day.

It was some minutes after Arthur had gone before May was able to rise from her chair. Arthur's elbow had struck her face just below the right eye, and it had given her a serious shock. When she had recovered her breath, she slowly rose, and went upstairs. A hurried glance in the looking-glass showed her that her eye was already beginning to swell, and would soon become discoloured. Having bathed it for a few minutes with a damp sponge, she hastily put on her things, and coming downstairs with a decided step, quickly left the house. Arthur was going to send a telegram, and she would send one too. Her eye was smarting and aching more and more, and she imagined she was being curiously

scrutinized by every person she met. But she was determined to accomplish her purpose, in spite of all. As she approached the post office, she looked cautiously around. It would not do for her to meet Arthur just then. Before entering the office, she peeped in between the doors. Arthur was not there, and, passing swiftly in, she stood at the partitioned shelf on which the telegram forms were laid, and wrote her message with a decisive hand. "Whatever you hear," she wrote, "do not fail to come, as arranged. May." She handed the paper to the clerk—whose gaze she felt upon her swollen eye, as though a burning glass were focussed on the spot—and, having paid her money and affixed the stamp, she came hastily out.

She had yet another errand to perform. Some one must meet Edith at the station when she arrived. Even if Arthur undertook to do it, there was no certainty that he would keep his word. For various reasons she could not go to the station herself. She must ask Frank Livingstone to go.

"Mrs. Vivian," said Frank, as in a few

minutes' time she presented herself at his counter, "you have been hurt. How——"

He suddenly checked himself at a thought that was full of horror.

"I've had an accident, Frank," said May, nervously. And then, observing a doubtful expression on Frank's face, she hastily added, "It was an accident, indeed, Frank."

"It's an ugly blow, at any rate, and you must mind the cold."

"Thank you; I'll take as much care as I can. But I want you to do me a favour, Frank. Arthur's sister is coming to-morrow evening by the six o'clock train; will you meet her at the station? It would be of no use to ask Arthur, and I can't go myself."

May had no suspicion of the tender flutter she had excited in this young man's breast. Frank actually blushed. To May it seemed a very matter-of-fact service that she had asked him to perform. He himself regarded it as anything but matter of fact. His chief anxiety was lest he should seem too eager to comply with her request.

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Vivian; I'll go with pleasure.

But are you quite sure it was an accident?" and he pointed to her swollen eye.

May divined his thoughts.

"No, Frank," she cried; "don't think that. Don't ever think that. He would never be so bad as that. Arthur did it, but it was an accident, indeed."

Just before tea-time, an answer came to May's telegram. "Expect me," it said, "without fail, at the time fixed."

When Arthur came home that evening, he was in a condition which rendered it impossible for May to ascertain whether or not he had fulfilled his threat of wiring to Edith not to come, but Edith's telegram assured her that, in any case, it would be all right.

"Well, I suppose she's coming?" said Arthur, after dinner, the next day.

"Yes, dear," said May. "She is to arrive by the six o'clock train. You'll come home in good time, won't you, Arthur?" But Arthur went out without making any reply.

Frank Livingstone and Edith Vivian could never remember what they said to each other

when they met at the station that evening. By some means Frank managed to let Edith know that he had come to meet her at May's request, and then he busied himself about her luggage, and saw about the 'bus.

May had done her best to prepare for her visitor a welcome not altogether sad. It was a cold March evening, and she had a cheerful fire in the grate, and a plain, but appetising, tea upon the table. Edith, on entering, saw nothing but the wan and sorrow-stricken face of May, who, the next moment, was weeping in her arms.

Edith was a person not much given to tears; but she felt a somewhat unmanageable lump in her throat.

"Please God, dear," she said, "we'll save him yet."

Then she turned to speak her acknowledgments to Frank, but he was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

A PITIFUL CATASTROPHE.

"WILL he be here soon, dear?" asked Edith, as May and she sat together at the tea-table.

"I don't know," replied May, wearily. "I hope so. I begged him to come home in good time. You won't be angry, Edith, if I tell you he wasn't pleased when he knew you were coming? I think he was afraid for you to come, and ashamed. He talked of telegraphing to stop you. That was why I sent that message. Did you get one from him as well?"

"No; but, of course, after your wire, it would have been all the same if I had."

"I thought I had better send," said May, with a sigh, "for I did want you to come. But you won't mind if Arthur is not so glad to see you as you would like him to be? It wouldn't be so if he were himself; but he's never himself now," and she burst into tears.

"Don't cry, dear," said Edith, gently; "perhaps your trouble will soon come to an end now."

"It's my own fault," said May, between her sobs. "You don't know how wicked I've been. Arthur signed the pledge—it was about the time you were here the year before last—and I gave him no rest till he had broken it, and then all at once he seemed to go mad. I've had a terrible price to pay, and I've deserved it all."

This was news to Edith, and she was shocked. But how could she reproach this broken and penitent wife? The price May had paid for her folly was reproach enough. Edith checked the exclamation of horrified surprise which had started to her lips.

"It is very sad that you should have done that, dear," she said, gently. "But you've

found that out for yourself. You must ask God to forgive you, and perhaps the time will come when you will be able to ask Arthur's forgiveness too."

"I don't think I can ever be forgiven," said May, in despairing tones. "I'm sure I shall never forgive myself. And it would be mockery to speak to Arthur of such a thing just now. But I would give my life to undo what I have done."

"But, May dear, you can ask God to forgive you; He knows how sincerely you repent."

May sadly shook her head. Edith was seized with a sudden thought.

"May," she asked in a tenderly serious tone, "do you never pray?"

"Not much, I'm afraid," replied May, with downcast eyes. "I've always said my prayers, of course, but lately I haven't had much heart even for that. I know very little about these things, Edith."

"But, my dear child, how much it would help you if you could trust in Christ as your Saviour, and take all your trouble to God!"

"Would it? Oh, Edith, you don't know

how dreadfully ignorant I am! I've always been brought up to go to church, you know, and we used to have prayers at home; but no one ever told me that there was anything more in religion than that."

Edith was deeply grieved, and full of pity; and, as they sat in the firelight—for they had turned from the table, having finished tea—she talked to her benighted sister, in her own wise, tender, and straightforward way, of the great Healer of human sorrows, that Divine Saviour whom she herself had known and loved so long. May found it no slight comfort to have Edith there, and to sit by the fire clasping her hand and listening to her soothing voice, and already the sweet breath of the Divine consolation of which Edith spoke was stealing into her desolate heart.

All the time Arthur was in the minds of both. When would he come home? May knew that the longer his coming was delayed the less likely was it that he would be sober when he came, and her heart was sick at the thought of his coming home to meet his sister in the state in which he so often returned

home in the evening. She listened for him with painful intentness. Once, on hearing sounds without, she left her seat, and hastened to open the door, only to be confronted by a beggar-boy.

"I did so entreat him to come home early," she said, wearily, as she returned to her seat.

"Patience, dear," said Edith; "he will perhaps be here just now."

But though they waited long, he did not come, and May's disappointment was keen. Edith, too, was disappointed; but she tried not to show it, and, to divert May's thoughts, she took her upstairs to assist in the unpacking of her box and the arrangement of her things.

"You see," she said, almost gaily, "I've come to stay for awhile, so I may as well begin to settle down at once. But, May dear, you must understand from the first that I am not going to be a burden to you. I can afford to pay my own way, and I'm going to do it all the time. But that can be arranged by-and-bye," and she ended with a gentle sisterly kiss.

May made a faint protest. But what could

she do? There were times when she hardly knew by what means the next meal was to be procured.

Twice while they were engaged upstairs, May was summoned down to the door. Each time she went with a beating heart, which was usual when she thought that her husband was there. But it was not he in either case. In one instance it was a boy with evening papers, and in the other, a man enquiring for the residence of one of the neighbours.

When, having finished the arrangement of Edith's things, they came downstairs again, it was almost nine o'clock. It had been cold upstairs this keen March evening, and they stood by the fire, for a few moments, warming their hands. Then, both raising their heads at the same instant, they looked into each other's eyes.

"He won't come now," said May, in a hollow voice, "till—till closing time."

The ominous significance of these words was not lost upon Edith, but she tried to appear as if she did not understand.

"Perhaps he has had business to do," she

said; "or he has called somewhere, and been detained."

May shook her head. These were suppositions she could not entertain. She knew the truth too well. She knew where Arthur was, and what he was doing, as accurately as though she had been an eye-witness of all that was going on.

"Well, dear," said Edith, turning her dark eyes lovingly on May, and taking her hand in her own firm soft fingers, "suppose we get the supper ready? He'll be hungry when he comes."

May herself had no appetite for supper. She seldom cared much for food now. She was not sorry for this, because it was the better for her purse. She yielded, however, to Edith's suggestion, and between them they set the supper out.

"Shall we wait?" asked Edith, when all was ready.

"It will be of no use," said May, sadly.

So they sat down, and made the bravest show of eating they could. Edith had mixed two fragrant cups of cocoa, the beverage May

had accustomed herself to take for supper, in place of the discarded glass of stout. Edith had scarcely any more appetite than May. In spite of her assumed cheerfulness, she was very sick at heart. She was deeply hurt that Arthur should not only not have met her at the station, but that, now that he was aware that she was actually in his house, he should, as though on purpose to shun her, have remained all the evening away from home. Arthur had been the playmate of her childhood, and the fond pride of her succeeding years; and he must be changed indeed if he could treat her like this. She was, moreover, torn with anxiety as to the condition in which he would ultimately appear. Yet she still struggled to preserve her cheerfulness, for May's sake. She compelled herself to eat, and, though with but slight success, endeavoured to coax May to do the same.

After they had finished supper, they sat listening to the sounds in the street. May started visibly at every little noise; and Edith, though outwardly calm, was scarcely less anxious at heart.

For the most part, they were silent. Edith tried now and then—it was always Edith—to start a conversation; but each time it subsided and died out like a fire lighted with damp wood. They had turned from the table, and were sitting hand in hand before the dying fire. The sounds in the street had become very "few and far between," and on the whole a profound and oppressive stillness prevailed. Suddenly the clock of a neighbouring church began to strike.

"Why, that's eleven o'clock!" exclaimed Edith, with a start.

May looked up with expanded eyes and parched lips. How often had she recognised, in the sounds now booming on the night, the signal for the close of her heart-sick vigil and the shameful home-coming of her self-dishonoured husband!

"Yes," she said, "he'll be here soon now. And, oh, Edith, you'll be very much shocked! But don't take more notice than you can help!"

"My dear, I'm afraid I know what to expect. But don't be concerned about me. I have

come to do all I can to help you, and to save him, if I can."

"Yes, I know," said May, with quivering lips; "and it was so good of you to come."

"I think," she added, rising, "we may as well be putting some of the things away. We'll leave Arthur's, but I know he won't take anything."

Suiting the action to the word, she began listlessly to remove some of the supper things from the table; and Edith rose to lend a helping hand. At the same moment there was a loud knocking at the door, which was immediately pushed open from without, and Frank Livingstone, with pity and horror in his face, stepped hastily into the room. He had evidently hurried, and could hardly speak for want of breath. The two women stood and confronted him with the things they had taken from the supper table still in their hands, their faces scarcely less horror-stricken than his own.

"Arthur hasn't come home," he said, scarcely knowing how to begin. "He'll be here directly."

"He was found lying in an unconscious state at the bottom of the Brewery steps."—*Page 147.*

Edith put down the things she was holding, and, going over to May, took her hand and held it firmly.

"There's been an accident; but I hope he's not much hurt."

May clutched convulsively at Edith's hand, and Edith drew her gently within her encircling arm.

"He was found lying in an unconscious state at the bottom of the Brewery steps. Why he went round there no one knows. They are bringing him home now."

There was a confused sound of feet and voices in the street, and then May was aware that her degraded, but still dearly-loved, husband was being carried in, lying on an old door, his face swollen and deathly pale, his head uncovered and his once glossy brown hair tossed in disordered masses like some dank, ill-favoured weed, and a sickening splash of blood upon his brow.

May wondered why she was so calm. Then the room began to swim: she uttered a faint cry, took one forward step, and fell fainting into Edith's arms.

The Brewery steps consisted of a dozen stone steps near a large brewery, and led to the less reputable part of the town. It could only be supposed that Arthur, being as usual strongly under the influence of drink, had missed his way in coming home. Frank Livingstone, returning from an errand in the neighbourhood, had found him lying at the foot of the steps. Arthur must have left the public-house before closing time.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RECOMPENSE OF VIGILANT LOVE.

ARTHUR remained for some days in a precarious state. The doctor, at whose house Frank Livingstone had called as he had hastened to carry to May the news of her husband's accident, had obeyed the summons without delay. A hasty examination had enabled him to pronounce that the chief injuries Arthur had sustained were in the head. There was an ugly cut above the temple; and there might, or might not, prove to have been serious injury to the brain. Arthur would be likely to remain unconscious for some hours; and it was impossible to say with certainty,

as yet, what the extent of his injuries might prove to be.

All through the night Arthur gave but little sign of life; and May having quickly recovered consciousness, she and Edith kept vigil by his side, while Frank Livingstone, who had insisted on remaining in the house, sat downstairs till morning, ready at any moment to obey their call.

Sustained by Edith's presence, and by the assurance of her sympathy, May had borne up bravely through the long dread hours. When the doctor had taken his departure, and they were left alone with their unconscious charge, Edith had drawn May down to her knees beside the bed, and prayed with simple earnestness that their loved and erring one might be spared to them, that his accident might be the means of his salvation from the drink, and that they who loved and sorrowed might be graciously sustained. May rose to her feet with a strange new sense of comfort like the inspiriting effect of some potent cordial hitherto untried.

All through the night there was no change in

the silent and almost motionless figure on the bed. Ill news travels fast, and ere the morning was many hours old, Daisy came—full of tender sorrow and alarm—with anxious face and brimming eyes. She remained the greater part of the day, and afforded much comfort with her sweet childish sympathy and ready help. She undertook all necessary errands, and rendered innumerable little services about the house, finding out for herself, as by an unerring instinct, all that needed to be done.

Mrs. Bancroft also came in the afternoon, and, having tenderly embraced her daughter, bestowed upon her sorrow a few moments of almost completely silent sympathy, and took a tearful leave. It was a grief to May that her father neither came nor sent a word. Frank Livingstone was in and out, during the day, more times, perhaps, than he would have quite cared to count. He was distressed exceedingly for Arthur, and for May; and probably his visits would have been no less frequent if Edith had not been there. But, for the present, there was little that he or any one else could do.

It was not till the afternoon of the second day that any signs of returning consciousness were seen. About three o'clock, as May sat by her husband's bed, holding his unresponsive hand, it was suddenly snatched convulsively from her grasp. Arthur's eyelids trembled, and his eyes opened, and rested for a moment on his wife's sad and anxious face. May started up, and bent over him with a smothered cry.

"Arthur, dear Arthur!"

But there was no recognition in his gaze, and in a moment he had relapsed into unconsciousness again. This first faint gleam of returning intelligence was followed by others; and, by degrees, Arthur became conscious of himself and of his surroundings once more. First the dim border-land had to be crossed; and it was a region of mists and shadows. It was evident that, during the earlier days of his recovered consciousness, Arthur had no recollection of recent events. He thought that he and May were still in the bright early period of their married life; and he asked her what had happened, and why he was in bed. May

answered discreetly, saying that he had had an accident, but giving no hint as to its nature or its cause.

Arthur continued in this state for several days; and then, gradually, his mind cleared, and he remembered distinctly all that had taken place. With the remembrance of his accident, the recollection of the shameful life he had recently led rushed upon him like a dark and turbid flood. The stream of evil reminiscence obliterated his pleasant dream as a fair garden might be blotted out by a flooding river. He covered his face with his hands in grief and shame.

"What is it, dear?" asked May, who had just given him food.

"Oh, May, I remember it all! What a brute I have been!"

This penitent cry was music in May's ears.

From this time, a horror of the drink took possession of Arthur's mind. One day the doctor suggested that a small quantity of spirit, taken occasionally, might help his patient to gain strength. May listened with sickening dismay; but, to her joy, Arthur

absolutely refused to take anything of the kind.

"Well," said the doctor, "perhaps we may try something else."

This new-born aversion for strong drink continued for a while; but, as Arthur grew stronger, it declined in force, and one day the old craving came back with a rush.

"May," he exclaimed in a tone of horror, catching at her hand, "it has come back!"

"What has, dear?" was May's startled question.

"That dreadful thirst."

"But you'll resist it, Arthur? You won't touch the drink any more?"

"How can I promise?" he groaned. "Oh, how weak I am! You must help me, May; and Edith—tell Edith to help me."

Arthur realised his danger, and desired intensely to refrain altogether from strong drink. While he lay in bed, unable to rise, he felt that he was safe; for he was sure that no one of his loving attendants would place within his reach the smallest portion of the deadly liquid for which he craved. But he knew

that, as soon as he was able to move and free to direct his own steps, the first place to which he would turn them would be the public-house. In his agony of dread, he appealed piteously to his sister and his wife.

"Oh, you must save me from myself!" he said. "If I get the chance, I shall take the terrible stuff, I know, in spite of myself, as I have so often done before. You must see that I don't get the chance. As long as I'm kept here, in the house, don't give me a drop of drink, however much I ask you; and when I begin to go out, watch me—and save me."

Putting their trust in God, the two brave women braced themselves for stern conflict with the deadly power which had once more drawn their loved one within its grasp. As long as Arthur was unable to leave his bed, or was confined to the house, their task, though not light, was less severe than it afterwards became. It was possible for May and Edith to prevent his taking strong drink while he was dependent on their ministrations for the supply of all his wants. It was possible; but there were times when it seemed almost cruel to deny him that

for which he entreated with such frenzied eagerness. If they could but have delivered him from this fiery thirst! At the outset, their only resource was prayer. Then, from time to time, Edith, in her calm wise way, talked with Arthur, and her talks were like cooling draughts to a fever patient. May pleaded with him too; and the sight of her anguished face intensified his desire to be delivered from the terrible appetite with which he was scorched. But though the agony of his craving was thus partially subdued from time to time, its paroxysms would return again and again.

Daisy joined in the work of nursing; and she too would gently plead with Arthur in her own simple way, until, one day, he horrified her loving little heart by replying with an entreaty, such as he often made of his wife and sister, that she would procure him some intoxicating drink.

In the midst of the long-drawn agony of those dreadful days, a great joy came to Edith and May. As they sorrowed in unison, and together strove to save Arthur from the power

of his resuscitated foe, it was Edith's privilege to lead May to the Saviour Whom she herself had known and loved so long; and henceforth their hearts were united by a stronger bond than even that of their common grief, and they were able to prosecute their struggle of love with a mutual sympathy which was now complete.

Needless to say, Frank Livingstone gave all the help he could; and it is not surprising that, though, as yet, no word of love had passed between himself and Edith, the tenderness of their regard for one another grew deeper day by day.

In the course of a fortnight, Arthur was sufficiently recovered to leave his room and come downstairs, and in another week he was able to go out of doors. Now came the actual struggle. It was necessary that Arthur should be watched unceasingly. He must never go out alone—a stupendous task! Yet the brave wife and sister did not shrink. It was intensely humiliating both to Arthur and to themselves that they must treat him as a lunatic who is not to be trusted out of sight,

but there were times when even Arthur admitted the necessity of their vigilance, and entreated them not to relax it in the least degree. Then, with the cunning common to madmen and the victims of strong drink, he would, now and again, elude his loving guardians, and slip out of the house, returning, after a brief absence, bearing about him the shameful and subtle signs which May had learnt by sad experience to know so well.

By degrees, however, it became evident that the victory was being won. After each transgression, Arthur, in deep distress, begged his wife and sister still to persist in guarding him against his peril. He showed the utmost readiness to listen to the exhortations of his friends, receiving even with eagerness Edith's sweet homilies, and hearkening gravely to the somewhat sterner pleadings of Frank.

Meanwhile these loving and anxious people did not cease to pray, and their prayers were not in vain. While their minds were still divided between hope and fear, Arthur was brought by Divine Grace to yield himself once more, as a penitent, to God, through

Christ; and there came a day when he could look up into the faces of his wife and sister, and tell them, with the light of the new life in his eyes, that he had found the shelter of the "Everlasting Rock."

After this, the task of May and Edith grew light. Arthur's craving for strong drink did not at once entirely pass away, but the new power he had received enabled him effectually to resist it, with the confident hope that, ere long, it would be completely subdued.

Arthur's recovery was very rapid now, and he was soon pronounced by the doctor to be completely restored to health, and ready for work. But what work? Here was a new trouble, or rather an old one revived, which had been forgotten in the midst of the deeper anxieties of recent days. Shortly after he had received his discharge from the doctor, two offers of employment were made to Arthur, both of which he respectfully but firmly declined. One was from his old friend, the butcher, who invited him to resume the keeping of his books, on the old terms; and the other was from May's father, who, having

been assured of the return of his son-in-law to the paths of sobriety, and being burdened with the consciousness that he had not fully discharged his duty towards his daughter and her husband, intimated to May that he would receive Arthur as one of his clerks. Mr. Bancroft was very angry when he found that his offer was declined; but Arthur, encouraged by May herself, was very firm, and, in a short time, he had his reward, in the shape of an offer from his old employers to take him again into their service, and restore him to the position he had previously held.

May is now, if not the happiest, yet surely the most grateful woman in the world, but she can never forget her folly in persuading her husband to break the Temperance pledge, or "the price she paid."

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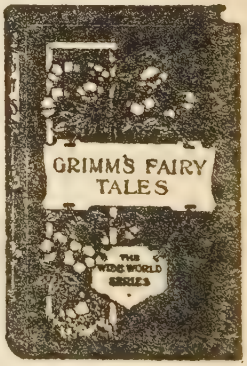

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